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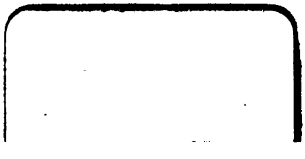

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THE VINLAND CHAMPIONS

His eyes showed fire, while his voice was deep.

THE
VINLAND CHAMPIONS

BY

OTTILIE A. LILJENCRANTZ

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PROLOGUE

It happened first in the history of the New World lands that the Northman Biorn Herjulfsson saw them when he had lost his way in journeying to Greenland. But he lacked the adventuresomeness to go ashore and explore them.

Then Leif the Lucky, son of Eric the Red of Greenland, heard of the omission and set out to remedy it. He rediscovered the lands and went upon them and named them, after which he built booths at a place he called Vinland and passed a winter there.

Next, Leif's brother Thorwald Ericsson came over the ocean; but his luck was less for he was shipwrecked on one cape and killed on another, and his men returned disheartened.

He was followed by the third brother, Thorstein; but this expedition had no success whatever for they spent a whole summer in wandering in a circle that landed them finally upon the west coast

for the camp-bred boy set the tune to a tripping measure that made the graceful blades seem to be kissing each other. Back and forth and up and down they went as in a dance, parry answering thrust so evenly that the ear grew to anticipate the clash and keep time to it as to music. But presently this very forbearance nettled the farm-bred lad so that he broke the rhythm with an unexpected stroke. Passing Alrek's guard, it opened a red wound upon his brown breast. He accepted it with a grimace as good-humored as his fencing, but his opponent was unwise enough to let fly a cry of triumph. Alrek's expression changed. The next time the Greenlander made use of that thrust, his blade was met with a force that jarred his arm to the shoulder. Under the hurt of it, he struck spitefully. Alrek answered in kind. Slowly, the even beat gave way to jerks of short sharp clatter, separated by pauses during which the two worked around each other with squaring mouths and kindling eyes.

With the beginning of the clatter, a short old man called Grimkel One-Eye and a long young man known as Hjalmar Thick-Skull, sitting at chess behind the mast, had put down their pieces

to listen. Now, the discord continuing, old Grimkel left his place and strolled forward to the forecastle steps. Spying blood spots on the Greenlander's white shoulders, he made Alrek of Norway a sign of warning. But the Viking boy did not even see him.

Over the spectators such stillness had fallen that the scuffle and slap of the bare feet upon the boards sounded with sickening distinctness. The in-drawn breaths made a hiss when, more swiftly than eye could follow, Alrek's blade described a new curve which the other's sword could not meet. To save himself from being spitted, the Greenlander was forced to leap backward. Leaping, his back came against the gunwale with a crash which told that further retreat would be impossible. From the watchers burst a cry, but no recollection relaxed the terrible intentness of the young Viking's eyes as a second time he drew back his arm to speed that lightning stroke. The Red One's rashness would have been his bane if the old man had not sprung upon the deck and caught Alrek's elbow.

"Do you remember that you are playing?" he growled.

If he needed an answer he had it in the savage force with which the boy tore himself free, and the fierceness with which he whirled, before the meaning of the words came home to him so that he lowered his point.

"You guess well," he muttered. "I had altogether forgotten." Half angrily he turned back to the Greenlander. "Why, in the Fiend's name, did you not remind me?"

Though much blood from his scratches was on the Red One's body and little was in his cheeks, he still tried to swagger. "I am no coward," he proclaimed. But on the last word his voice broke so hysterically that Grimkel thought it the part of kindness to interfere, and did so, his kindness masking as usual under gruff severity.

"You are a fool, which is worse," the old man snapped, pushing him roughly down the steps, while with his head he motioned those below to disperse. "Go put on sense with your clothes. Get dressed, all of you. If you do not do as I tell you, you will feel it." When he had shaken his fist at them once or twice and finally seen himself obeyed, he turned back where Alrek stood drying

his weapon on a cloak he had thrown around him. "You! Listen! I have a warning I want to speak to you."

"You would do better to warn the Red-Head against stirring me up again," the young Viking returned, still half angrily; but the One-Eyed heard him as a rock hears a wave-splash.

"Before now, I have reminded you that your father was an outlaw——"

"That you have!" Alrek assented. "Six times have I heard the tale since I touched Greenland, though I lived eight years in the camps without hearing it once! In Norway, men remember only that my father was the bravest of the Earl's Vikings."

"In Iceland, they remember that before he became a Viking he was an outlaw," the old man went on inperturbably, "and so like your father are you in looks that every eye is watching to find his unruliness in you. Now what I would tell you is that if you do not bridle this Viking fierceness, you will ruin yourself with Karlsefne."

The boy uttered a sudden short laugh. "Is it possible that I could get less honor with him?"

he jeered; and polished awhile in tight-lipped silence. At last he straightened to meet the other's gaze and his eyes showed fire, while his voice was deep with resentment. "I am Karlsefne's brother's son, but I get less praise from him than his thralls. He notices his dogs more often than he notices me. It is difficult to know what he expects of me. I believe that he hated my father."

Grimkel rubbed his bristly chin upon his palm. "It cannot be said that Karlsefne has a fondness for outlaws. So great is his love for the law that he was called 'the Lawman' before ever the chiefs who came with him on this expedition chose him to be over-chief in Vinland. Yet neither can it be said that he hated his brother. While they were young their love was great toward each other; and when Ingolf, your father, broke the Iceland law, Karlsefne gave half his property to pay the fine. And when Ingolf died, Karlsefne brought you into his following——"

"Where he shows every day that he holds me in dishonor for being his brother's son," Alrek finished.

The old man spat over the gunwale with ex-

plosive impatience. "Simpleton! He holds you neither in honor nor dishonor—yet. He but waits to see which you will earn."

Slowly, understanding dawned in the boy's face; turning away he stood kicking at a pile of walrus-hide thongs coiled on the deck before him.

Grimkel concluded his plea earnestly; "You cannot say that this is unfair. It lies with you to take whichever you want. For my part, I believe that you will do him credit in every respect. It is because I believe this, and because I loved your father in the days when he was your height and I taught him spear-throwing, that I speak."

After a while, Alrek said gravely, "I take it as very friendly of you."

He said nothing further, finishing his rubbing in silence and in silence descending the steps, but his advice-giver needed no more than one eye to see that at last he understood the difficulties of his position.

CHAPTER II

IN WHICH THE BOYS OF THE WIND-RAVEN CONSIDER THE CHANCES OF FINDING A SKRAELLING

MEANWHILE, something was happening aft. Over his horn the helmsman discovered that a thin place in the fog vail was wearing into a hole, through which could be seen a low coast ending far ahead in a cloud-like hill.

"The Cape of the Crosses!" he broke the news, and the word was caught and tossed along like a ball.

"The Cape of the Crosses! The last point we must touch at!" the men cheered as they hurried to get up sail and put about for the opening door.

And the twenty lads, busy settling beltfuls of knives over tunics of deerskin, plunged into such eager anticipation of the joys of the landing that it was no time at all before they were scuffling with

the Red One, whose smarting wounds made him particularly perverse. By the time Alrek had got into *his* tunic and buckled on the beautiful weapon that gave him his nickname of "the Sword-Bearer," he was obliged to weather a storm of nutshells in order to join the group. It took all the persuasion of the stout comely fellow called Erlend the Amiable to bring them back to peaceful discussion.

"We were talking of going ashore to-morrow and considering about whether there is any good chance that Skraellings may be there now," he explained, when he could make himself heard.

The subject attracted Alrek. Strolling over to the Amiable One's bench, he stretched himself upon it and made his head comfortable on Erlend's gay blue cloak. "Now it had fallen out of my mind," he mused, "that it was here that the inhabitants killed Thorwald Ericsson, when he went up on land and found three boats with three men hiding under each——"

"What is your tongue wagging about?" Ketil the Glib interrupted. "It was not those men that killed him; he killed all of them but one, who es-

caped in a boat. It was the host which that one brought back that shot arrows into him until—" He was interrupted in his turn by a piece of sail-cloth which the red-haired boy threw over his head.

" Gabbler! He knew that story before you had chipped the shell," the Red One snubbed him. " Go on, Alrek, and say whether you think it is to be expected that we will see any."

The Sword-Bearer shrugged his shoulders. " You should have the best judgment about that, Brand Erlingsson, for you were visiting your brother Rolf at Brattahlid when Thorwald's men brought back the tidings of his death. You know whether or not it is their belief that Skraelings live on the Cape."

The Red One—who, it appeared, answered also to the name of Brand Erlingsson—replied earnestly. He said that Thorwald's men did not believe that the creatures lived there, but that they inhabited the mainland and only visited the Cape for clams or something; that the Cape was no more than a thin land-neck, that ended in a kind of cross-bar composed of a beach connecting two hills;

and that it could not possibly have anything of interest on it; whereas, if they could go on to Keel Cape——

But there the shell shower recommenced, amid a protesting chorus; "Do not let him get started—" "End his noise!" "He is always sputtering!" And Strong Domar extinguished the last sputter by a wild whoop as he tossed up his cap in celebration.

"However it stands, our chance for catching some there on a visit is as good as Thorwald's! Luck be with us!" he shouted. Whereupon he tossed up his neighbor's cap—being much given to good-natured jests of the fists—and the jubilee would have been general if it had not suddenly been discovered that Alrek was slowly shaking his head on its blue pillow.

"Why not?" they paused to demand.

When he had taken his full time about chewing and swallowing a mouthful of nuts, he told them; "Because we lack Thorwald's energy at the helm. He went ashore so soon after he cast anchor that the men on the Cape did not have time to get away. We shall remain quiet a whole night after we come

to anchor. If it should happen that any Skraellings are there, they would have plenty of light to see us by, and the whole night to escape in. Little danger is there that the Weathercock will break the Lawman's order to keep peace with the inhabitants; but if Karlsefne is to be any better off about news of them, he will find it needful to put a shrewder man at the steering oar."

The celebration died in mid-air; no more chance was there of denying the argument than of remedying the fact. What comfort they could get out of blaming the helmsman, they took; then returned one by one to a gloomy munching of nuts from the store under the benches. In the lull, Brand of Greenland found opportunity to vent the rest of his dissatisfaction.

"Neither will any good come to us out of these trips, while the Weathercock steers!" he burst out, shaking the hair from his bright impatient eyes. "These five months, we have gone ashore only when there was no chance for adventure to result from it; and so have I tired of this trough that I could gnaw the edge of it as a horse gnaws his stall! Sooner than I shall make another voyage under his

leadership, I will paddle back to Greenland in a skin-boat!"

The fact that they all agreed with him did not prevent them from jeering through their mouthfuls. Even his loyal younger brother, Olaf the Fair, showed a merry face under his yellow curls.

"You speak too small words! Say that you would build a dragon-ship and have sole power over it," he mocked,—then scrambled discreetly out of reach as Brand turned on him.

"Well—I *could!*" the Red One defied the universe. "King Half owned a ship and headed a band when he was no more than twelve winters old——"

Jeers cut him short. "King Half! He will liken himself to Olaf Tryggvasson next!" "You great donkey, you!" "No—calf, with the milk of his kinsman's dairy-farm still in him!" cried the unoccupied mouths, while the full ones grinned broadly.

Only Alrek, smiling up at the sky, said whimsically; "Give me leave to travel with you when it is built, champion. I should like to be on a ship that would come and go according to my will. For

one thing, I should like to go ashore to-night to see Thorwald Ericsson's grave. The Huntsman told me once, when I laughed at his magic, that if ever I stood beside a grave in the noon of night I should know what fear was. It has long been in my mind to prove him a liar, but no other grave than Thorwald's is in the new land. If we were on your ship now——"

"What is to be said against swimming?" inquired Gard the Ugly, from the bench where he sat weaving fish-nets,—for it was a trace of the thrall blood which was in him, that, although he was free, his great hands were always busy with some service.

"Hallad, Biorn's foster-son, used that expedient once,—and it can not be said that he is of a bold disposition even if he did go with the Huntsman this summer. I am willing to try it. We can slip overboard shortly after it becomes dark, and spend the time before midnight in ranging over the beach,—I would give a ring to get the knots out of my legs! Will you do it?"

Pulling himself up lazily, Alrek sat a while gazing ahead where a second hazy mass, seemingly

as far away as the horizon itself, was rapidly pushing out from behind the Cape.

"Why not?" he responded at last. "Only, the swimming part is not to my mind; I find that deerskin dries on me less easily than on deer. Because of what has been told of the shallowness of the harbor, it is unlikely that we shall anchor very near to land; so it is my advice that we take the small boat. We can lower it with little trouble, if there is no moon, while the men are aft drinking their ale."

He rose as he spoke, and Gard leaped up also and clapped him on the back in token that it was a bargain; at which the scoffers quieted into a semblance of interest, and Erlend regarded him with amusement.

"Suppose it does not happen that you get a chance to tell the Huntsman of your experience?" he suggested. "I think it altogether unlikely that he will return from his trip to the south country. Will the entertainment be worth the exertion?"

Alrek gave him a poke between his well-padded ribs. "A man must risk something if he wishes to avoid getting fat," he answered. Whereat the

Amiable One came in for his share of gibing; and during it, Gard put his arm through the Sword-Bearer's and drew him forward to look at the land.

The land was worth looking at, certainly, as it revealed itself bit by bit through the mellow haze of the sunset. Skimming toward it in the path of a breeze, it was not long before the sickle-curve of a harbor had drawn out from behind the Cape. Then the inner of the Cape hills looked out from its hiding place beyond the seaward knoll. Next, a streak of white beach unfolded itself between them. Finally the whole began to take on color, gray giving way to grayish green and brown and red, while the cold gleam along the water's edge warmed into faint yellow.

So it lay motionless and soundless in the waning light, the sun fading from it in a drowsy smile, as the helmsman ordered the sail to be lowered and the anchor to be heaved overboard, and the little ship settled into her berth with a groan of satisfaction.

CHAPTER III

RELATING HOW ONE WAS FOUND ON THE CAPE OF THE CROSSES

A MEANS to while away a long evening,—that was how the pair looked upon the trip as they rowed away from the ship's stem while the crew chatted over their ale horns in the torchlight of the stern. Dreamily enjoying the boat's motion and the rhythm of their oars, they swung through the dusk in contented silence; and only once did their thoughts reach the point of speech.

"He is knowing in all kinds of weird matters, your countryman the Huntsman," Alrek said, reminiscently. "Do you remember the time that he was lost in the unsettled places south of here, and, after looking for him far and wide, we found him lying flat upon a rock, mumbling at the sky? He said he was making stanzas to Thor, and that it was an answer when a whale came ashore the next day——"

"If that is the cheer which Thor has to offer, may I never eat at his house!" Gard grunted. "So starved was I that I ate a piece the size of my head, and—excepting the time of my first storm at sea—it has never happened to me before to be so sick! If Thor gives the Huntsman no better help where he is now, it is likely to go hard with him. It is said that the south country is more full of Skraellings than a goat of fleas. He was a headstrong fool to go there with no more than three men and one small boat."

Alrek lifted his shoulders indifferently. "If he never comes back, the sea will be no salter for my tears," he answered; and relapsed into silence which was not broken until their nearness to land obliged him to ask a question about the steering.

If there was a moon, it had stayed sulking somewhere behind something, leaving the world in a dusk which was equally far from light and from darkness. Through the gloom they had been able to steal off with the boat in chuckling security; now its glimmer was still sufficient to guide them to a landing-place upon the pebble-strewn sand, which

ran like a shelf around the base of the seaward hill. Beaching their boat they clambered up the slope, tripping more than once over the fist-big stones which studded it, before they entered breathless and laughing into the grove that crowned the crest.

"Who cares about seeing, so long as he can feel earth under him!" Gard cried. And all at once he had dropped upon the leaf-covered ground and was rolling over and over like a horse just freed from a tight girth, while Alrek stretched his cramped muscles in a somersault.

Something in the fragrance of the damp leaf-mold seemed to intoxicate them. Presently, both were whirling on their hands; and from that they went to jumping, and from jumping to wrestling. The shadows had grown a finger's length before they sank down to get their breath.

As the grove was nowhere very thick and the sea gale had winnowed the leaves, they had not looked about them long before they made out the objects which gave the Cape its name,—the two rude crosses of dead bleached wood rising in the center of an open space by the sea. Around it, fanlike pine-boughs swayed heavily, and that was all there

was of motion; and the only sound that broke its stillness was the splash of waves on the sand below. Between the Crosses, a low mound rounded black against the gray water. Their hearts gave a little throb as they distinguished it—Thorwald's grave! Amid a chattering throng out in the sunlight, those words had not conveyed much; but here—here they took on meaning. Rising silently, the lads groped their way between the pines until they stood beside it.

Into Gard's voice there came a note of awe. "Thorwald said this cape looked to be a fine place to live in; I wonder how he likes it to be dead here? Strangely still must it seem to him after the battle-din of his life! And strange feelings must have been in his men's minds when they sailed away and left him here, the only white man on this side of the ocean."

"He must have found it lonesome to lie here by himself for four winters," Alrek said very gently. "Surely, if he hears our voices, his heart must welcome the sound. I tell you, Gard, I think I should not be sorry if we found him sitting on his grave when we came back at midnight. If we should tell

him that we are his comrades' sons and relate to him all the news, it may well be that he—— "

Gard's hand fell on his arm. "Hush!" he entreated. "I do not care what any one says on shipboard, but here—! Suppose he should be listening and take you at your word! Brand says that sooner than go into a witch's den as Leif's Englishman did, he would allow his arm to be hewn off,—and a witch's temper is more to be depended upon than the temper of a dead man. I am not eager to grasp his bony hand, if you are. Let us go down to the beach—But first, I want to find that knife I dropped. Will you feel around that bush-clump where I came down at the last leap, while I look over the slope where I stumbled? "

"Certainly," Alrek consented; and picked his way over the uneven ground to the spot where a clump of sumacs fringed the edge of the hill-crown as it sloped down to the beach. Just before he stooped to feel for the knife, however, he paused to look around.

Seaward, on his left, shone the far-away torches of the ship, a streak of brightness on the gray. Below him stretched the beach, its farther end lost in

the looming shadow of a tree-crowned hill—he blinked and leaned forward and blinked again. Out of that shadow, a light had seemed to open on him like an eye! It did not come from the ship; he glanced over his shoulder to reassure himself. It came from the hill across the beach, a dim unwinking eye which up to this time some obstacle had hidden.

For an instant he thought of ghost-fires, and cold trickled down his spine; then came a recollection that smote every nerve like a cry,—the Skraellings! Some had been trapped and had not yet escaped, and it was going to fall to him to get sight of them! To succeed where all the rest had failed! To be the one to give Karlsefne the information he wanted! What wonder that all recollection of the knife—even of Gard—was wiped off his brain like breath-mist off a shield; that he was obliged to press his nails deep into his flesh to get a grip on his excitement!

"I shall wreck the chance if I go about it hotly," he admonished himself. "It was Karlsefne's strong command that we do nothing to offend them. I must steer it so that I see them with-

out their seeing me,—and it is unadvisable to be too slow in acting, either, or they will have made their escape!" He put his body in motion even while his mind was debating, but it did not render him less cautious. He did not let a finger of him stray beyond the shadow of the pines, nor did he venture upon the beach until he saw his way clear before him.

The only objects that offered shelter were the low hummocks, crested with tufts of wiry grass, that stretched in a broken chain between the heights. From link to link of this he crawled, unobtrusive as a serpent; and when the links were wanting and gaps of glimmering sand lay before him, he ran crouching with the light swiftness of a fox, holding his breath in expectation of arrows hissing about his ears. None came, however, and at last the shadow of the second knoll and its spreading tree-crown fell over him like a canopy. There he paused to listen.

Once, an owl wailed tremulously from a distant tree; and once, it seemed to him that he heard brush crackle as under a stealthy tread; then all was silence and the swish of breaking waves. Lay-

ing hold of a gnarled root that reached down like a writhen arm, he drew himself noiselessly up the slope. Where it flattened to the crest, a clump of sassafras shoots made a fragrant screen. When he had listened and found the quiet still unbroken, he ventured to peer between the sprouts.

So long did he remain there without moving that the insects he had startled began walking over him in restored confidence. The little nook was empty. Except the patch of embers and a litter of clam shells, there was no sign to prove that living things had ever been there. As a final test, he hung his helmet upon his sword and showed it cautiously above the bushes, and the decoy drew no arrows from the thicket beyond the fire; the spot appeared to be genuinely deserted.

It is not too much to say that his disappointment brought him near to tears. "They must have run away as soon as darkness fell," he muttered. And pushing into the open, he sent the shells flying before a savage kick. "What Troll's luck!"

As the words left his lips, the flying shells uncovered a peculiar bowl-shaped basket woven of

reeds. He stooped to it curiously; then, even as his fingers closed on the rim, he took another step forward, staring at the bushes that hedged the further side of the open space.

"It appears that some one has plunged through here in a hurry," he told himself. "The branches are bent as if—Odin!"

There was no need of finishing his thought. His eyes had the answer before them, a shaggy figure crouching among the bushes, so motionless that it might have passed for one of them. An instant he also stood motionless, staring back at the eyes that he could feel without seeing; then Viking training flashed two thoughts to his brain,—that the creature was aiming at him from the darkness, and that he must lose no time in advancing. Clutching his sword-hilt, he sprang forward.

After that there was no chance for reflection. For a second the blade stuck; and in the delay a copper-colored arm shot out and fastened on his wrist, while the other copper-colored arm brandished a stone hatchet over his head. With his left hand he caught that arm and held it off; and they swayed, panting, in the firelight that gave him his

first glimpse of the foe all sailors yarned about,—the bristling black hair and wide-rimmed beast-bright eyes, and the skin of unearthly hue showing under the animal hides of the covering. Under the copper-colored skin, the muscles were like copper wire. Strong as he was, Alrek could not twist aside that wrist above his head. He gave up trying, presently, and limited his efforts to freeing his sword-arm. Putting all his force into the wrench, he succeeded at last in loosing it and shooting forth his weapon—and that was all that he had to do! At the bare sight of it, darting glittering from its sheath like lightning from a cloud, the Skraelling uttered a yell of terror, dropped the hatchet from his hand and his hands from their hold, and flung himself backward into the darkness. There was a crackling of brush, the spat of bare feet upon sand, and then—silence.

Gradually the Sword-Bearer's amazement gave way to amusement. "He thought it was magic,—here is a joke of the Fates!" he breathed. "If Thorwald had but shown them steel, it is likely that he could have put the whole host to flight! Never could I have wrested the hatchet from him. Now

it is likely that my kinswoman Gudrid will open her eyes when I show her this!" Bending over the embers, he examined the weapon with deep interest; the edge was knife-sharp. "It would have cleft me as if it cut cheese!" he muttered; and was laughing in somewhat unsteady congratulation when the sound of feet scrambling up the slope straightened him to greet Gard.

For a space the Ugly One stared about him, blinking in the firelight; then the eagerness of his swarthy face gave way to bitterest reproach.

"You scared them away before I had a chance to see them?" he cried. "Slipped away, because my back was turned, and got all the sport for yourself? Never would I have believed it of you! Never——"

Alrek threw up his hands in honest compunction. "Gard, I beg of you to forgive me! It is the truth that when I saw the light, I forgot that you were alive. And I feared the Skraellings would get away before I could see them. I intended only to creep up and look, without—" He broke off and stood with his mouth open, staring at the other.

Involuntarily, Gard whirled to dart a glance

over his shoulder; and finding nothing, cried out, sharply; "What ails you? Have you got out of your wits?"

Alrek regained his self-control with a short laugh. "I think I have," he answered. "Do you know another thing besides yourself that I forgot? I forgot Karlsefne's command to keep the peace."

CHAPTER IV

WHEREIN THE SWORD-BEARER IS FURTHER REMINDED THAT HE HAS BROKEN THE LAW

THE return to the Wind-Raven was even fuller of thought than the departure from it had been; though once Gard broke out in lamentation:

"If you had only allowed me to have part in the fun, *I* should have remembered."

Although his shoulders remained square-set against the gray of the night, Alrek's silence was so full of skepticism that the other blushed and hastened to speak of something else:

"Why are you so bold as to tell of this? It seems to me sufficient to say only that you found the hatchet on the ground."

"The Weathercock must be warned," Alrek said briefly. "Do you not see that this Skraelling may bring back a host, as happened to Thorwald?"

Apparently Gard saw, for he did not speak

again. The silence lasted unbroken until they glided under the ship's prow, and a chorus of suppressed greetings came down to them.

"Hail, explorers! What luck?" "It seems that your stay was short—" "Was Thorwald lacking in hospitality?" the voices laughed, while the hands reached down to pull them aboard and assist in raising the boat.

When at last the pair stood on deck, however, the tune changed. "Now there are tidings in their faces!" cried the boy who, from the quality of his temper, was known as the Bull. "News! Let us have it out of them!" Whereupon the group made a fence across the way, every picket in it crying, "Give up your news!"

Gard waved them off crossly. "I have none," he growled.

Alrek gazed back at them as though they really were boards in a fence. "Where is the Weathercock?" he inquired of the Amiable One. "Has he drunk the wits out of him yet?"

"Such as they are, I think he has them still about him," Erlend answered. "But will you not tell us——"

The Sword-Bearer shook his head as he pulled away from the other's ringed hand. "The jest is not good enough to bear two tellings. Come after me if you want to hear it." Whereupon the line instantly became a column, marching at his heels as he walked aft.

On the after-deck, the helmsman who was known among his followers as the Weathercock, was droning a song over his ale horn. He was a fat bald-headed man with a heavy doughlike face and a grizzled beard that bristled like wiry beach-grass from his plucking at it while he sang. His listeners greeted the appearance of the lads with much cordiality; but he took the interruption very ungraciously indeed.

"It may well be that the reason boys always come at the wrong time is because there is no right time for such hindrances," he snapped. "Which of you wants what of me?"

The oncoming wave fell back a little, leaving the Sword-Bearer stranded before the helmsman. He said, saluting, "I want to tell you that when you go upon the Cape to-morrow you must go in war clothes. I have been ashore and seen a Skraell-

ing; and I think he has gone to call his people to arms."

"What!" cried all the men in chorus; and those on the outer edge leaned forward, palms curved around their ears. Only the Weathercock sat squinting in a dull man's attempt at sharpness.

"What kind of jest is this?" he sneered at last.

Alrek drew the stone hatchet from his belt. "One of the proofs that it is not a jest is this."

There were more exclamations, while a dozen hands snatched at it; but old Grimkel bent forward and pinned his eye upon the Sword-Bearer.

"How did you get it?" he demanded. "You did not fail to remember——"

The boy's lips curved into a rueful smile as he met the look. "I remember now," he said slowly, "and I remembered up to the time I saw the Skraelling. But when I came upon him suddenly——"

"You attacked him?" It was the helmsman who screamed that, his doughlike face reddening to the very nose-end.

Alrek regarded him with critical brown eyes. "You prove a good guesser," he said politely.

From all sides went up exclamations of dismay; while from the Weathercock went up smoke and flames as though Hekla itself had broken loose.

"You — you — you good-for-nothing-wolf's-whelp-gone-mad!" he sputtered. "What do you mean by standing there so quietly when your mad-dog temper has brought discredit upon my leadership which would otherwise have got me great fame with the Lawman? One thing after another, worse and worse, will be caused by this! The Skraellings may be surrounding us even as we speak; and we shall be forced to share your disobedience or else get killed—or, it may be, both fight and get killed, since when Karlsefne finds how his orders have been regarded— But the first result of this will be that we will not go ashore tomorrow nor any other time—Ale! Faste! Hjalmar! Up with the anchor and out with the sail——"

As cries of protest arose, he beat them down with his short fat arms. "You shall not set foot upon land, you pack of ravening curs! Not until you get to camp,—and then I hope you will have reason to wish— Ah, to think that when we get to

camp I must tell this instead of the report I had expected to give!" He struck his fists together until it seemed as if he might forget the Sword-Bearer's free birth and lay them on him in blows. "Why did I not remember that you had outlaw blood under your fair speaking, and keep you under my heel! But you shall pay for your liberty now. You shall be tied with walrus thongs and thrown into the foreroom, and kept there without food or drink until we reach Vinland! Take him hence,—do you hear my words? Lodin! Grimkel!"

He broke off to tug at his belt, which unwonted exertion was rendering distressfully snug; and in the interval the protests of the young Greenlanders burst forth anew, expressing unreservedly what they thought of him for taking away their chance of going ashore. When he turned on them, his thick neck rumbling volcano-like, they even gave back curse for curse; until—what with their racket and his bawling and the running to and fro of the sailors—the after-deck of the Wind-Raven presented a lively appearance.

The only quiet person on it was the culprit. Saluting with ironical ceremony, he yielded to the

touch of Grimkel's hand upon his shoulder; and they proceeded to the little room under the foredeck, which served on extraordinary occasions for a dungeon and on ordinary ones as a storeroom for bales of fur and ale-casks and kegs of salted fish.

"If I could learn to feed my stomach through my nose, I should not starve however long I stayed here," Alrek observed with an expressive grimace as they entered.

The hand on his shoulder shook him roughly. "You deserve to starve," the old man snapped. "I have the heart to pound you! After I had warned you how the Lawman is holding you in the balance!" He jammed into its bracket the torch he carried, and sent a barrel out of his way with a thundering kick.

Somehow, the heat of his elder's concern moved the boy to an affectation of unconcern. Holding out his wrists for the rope, he replied that if Karlsefne had been watching him for two years, it was time he found out something.

Grimkel jerked at the thongs with a growl for every knot. "You will find out something when you come before him! Have you got it into your

mind that you have prevented him from fulfilling what lies nearest his heart? Since the time when he was making ready for his journey at Leif Ericsson's house in Greenland, he has counted on strengthening the settlement by making friends of the Skraellings; and planned to get knowledge from their experience of the country, and riches by trading with them. And he has condemned Thorwald's short-sightedness in attacking them, and commanded how they should be received with gifts and fair words— Oh, it is impossible that the Fates will allow a wise man to be balked by a boy's folly!"

"If it is impossible why do you trouble yourself over it?" Alrek suggested; then went on to request that the hatchet be carefully preserved for him.

Grimkel, bending over to fasten the ankle-bonds, straightened stiffly in awful silence. But before his exasperation could escape through his lips, a waking thrill ran along the Wind-Raven's spine; a voice called him to lend a hand with the sail, and he was obliged to wheel and stamp away.

With him went the torch; so that the dark-

ness of the foreroom became a black wall, upon which a gray square like a patch showed where the low doorway opened into the night. Gradually, the outside hubbub died away until the only sound that came in was the creaking of ropes and the sail's dull boom.

Left to himself, the boy left off feigning; and turned and grappled with his trouble. Breast to breast they struggled, while the gray square melted shade by shade into cold light; and when the square was gilded by the morning sun, they were struggling still.

Trying to shake off his thoughts, the Sword-Bearer flung his fettered body about in a kind of frenzy. "If I stay three days like this, I shall go out of my wits!" he cried to himself. "To lose all my chance with him is bad enough, but to sit here and think about it—! I shall become mad if I cannot move about and forget it for a while!"

CHAPTER V

THROUGH WHICH THE STORM GIANT BLUSTERS

A STOOPING black shape against the sunshine, Hjalmar Thick-Skull came through the doorway and began to paw over bales and boxes in search of extra oars.

"Your luck is great, young one," he remarked. "You would not be sitting quiet if you were outside. Perhaps you think, because you see sun through the door, that the whole sky is like that; but you should see the clouds ahead of us! The only thing equally black is the Weathercock's face since he finds that he must put into the Keel harbor after all. And on top of it the wind has failed, and he has commanded all hands to the oars——"

Rising to his fettered feet, Alrek held out his bound hands. "Here are mine! Take your knife to the knots."

The Thick-Skulled gaped over his shoulder. "Why—why—he did not mean you."

"Have I not hands?" the Sword-Bearer de-

manded. "With a troll's strength in them this morning! Certainly he meant me."

He strove to speak carelessly while his fingers were twitching, but some breathlessness must have betrayed him. Scratching his tow mane and staring as he scratched, Hjalmar began slowly to grin. After a little, Alrek laughed also and spoke in frank appeal:

"Do me this good turn, shipmate, that I may stretch myself some while. If he did not mean me, yet might you easily have mistaken him. You can tell him so when he makes a fuss,—it is not likely that he will notice me until the storm is over. You know it is a saying that 'the wolf allays the strife of the swine.'"

After a while, the Thick-Skulled stooped, grinning, and laid his knife against the thongs. "Behold what a good thing it is to have a reputation for dulness!" he said. "But see to it that you bear me out by giving good service at the oar."

The Sword-Bearer stretched his arms with a sigh of relief. "Only let me get at it!" he breathed, and plunged into the air like a fish into the water.

True enough! Though sunshine lay bright on the Wind-Raven's decks and blue sky was above her, before her—like the entrance to another world—sagged a canopy of slate-colored clouds. Swollen with rain, they hung low over the shore-line of forest and dune and darkened all the distant water save where, here and there, streaks of white gleamed like monsters' bared teeth. Full of ominous warning was the calm that had fallen on land and sea, robbing the sail so that it hung like a live thing gasping for breath.

"If he did not put into the harbor he would be likely to share the fate of Thorwald Ericsson, and be cast ashore in the same place, and likewise with a broken keel," Alrek commented after a look at the sky; then laid hold of his oar and bent himself almost to the bottom of the boat in the relief of spending his energy.

Perhaps his appreciation of a small favor touched the Fates in their woman hearts, for presently they extended it. When the Wind-Raven's brood had brought her safely behind the wooded bar that lay across the harbor mouth like a screen in front of a door, the helmsman gave out word

that since they were plainly storm-bound for the night, at least, they would not deny themselves the comfort of a camp on land, but would proceed immediately ashore. Ashore! the Sword-Bearer could scarcely believe his good fortune, until Brand dared to lean over and poke him in congratulation.

"I knew the Old One would take care not to have his fat jolted," he whispered; "and he can not leave you behind. Your luck will last until we come back again."

"Until we come back again!" Alrek repeated as though it were a toast, and threw himself resolutely into the work of the hour.

There was field for action. They had barely reached the shore and found refuge in a hollow below a wooded knoll when the tempest burst upon them, rushing through the forest with a swelling roar that rose above the thunder of the breakers. After that every minute of the day was a battle—a fight over the tent canvas which the wind threatened to pick up and carry off like a kerchief with all of them hanging to it in a fringe; a skirmish for fuel through forests into which sand from the

dunes beyond was rushing like yellow swarms with biting mouths; a contest over the fire, blown out or struck out with lances of glittering rain; a struggle to hear or be heard through the thundering downpour, to see the very food in their hands through the suddenly fallen darkness—a battle between giants and pygmies!

Exhausted yet exhilarated, as after a day at the sword-game, the band fell over from eating to sleeping. When the lightning tore apart the darkness and disclosed the deserted ship reeling in terror upon the twisting black water, they only laughed and burrowed deeper, falling asleep to the thunder of breakers booming along the shore as to a lullaby from a mother's lips.

The ocean was still booming when they awoke, late the next day, and the wind was still blustering in the tree tops. The leader, with his mind reaching out toward Vinland fires and Vinland fare, cursed peevishly; but the juniors of his following greeted the delay with open rejoicing.

"Here is our chance to see the land!" Brand cried, shaking out his ruddy locks like fiery banners. "Let us take it before anything gets it

away from us. I will wager a ring that I will beat any one to the top of this steep!"

So promptly did they respond that although he won his wager, the next boy was only a step behind; and none of the twenty was more than a pace in the rear. Once on the crest, they streamed, whooping, into the grove of oak and pine and sassafras which they had seen from the water, lying along the bay shore like a ragged rich-hued mat.

Raggedness showed more plainly than richness, upon a nearer approach, though nothing could take away the beauty of coloring where pines spread their ever-living green over the windy crests and the oak trees on the slopes had turned yellow and russet and red without losing a leaf. But it was no such forest as Vinland boasted; compared with Vinland trees the growth was stunted and there was not enough underbrush to give it even the wildness of a thicket,—only tangles of rose briar and berry bramble where the ridges sank into hollows cupping reed-fringed ponds. Perhaps the best that could be said for it was that its endless undulations kept curiosity awake. Passing

over them was like breasting billows; one gained a height only to behold another deep.

After a while, it stirred Alrek to restlessness. When it was suggested that they should stop at one of the ponds for a duck hunt, he objected.

"Who knows what the next ridge may be hiding?" he said obstinately. "Let us find out first what lies before us."

"What but the ocean?" Erlend asked in surprise. "That can not be far away now; the sand wastes between the trees are getting much wider."

But Alrek was already moving on, dealing blows of his hatchet at the trees on either side of him. "Do as you like," he answered over his shoulder. "I shall not stop until I come to the end."

Erlend sent him a glance of surprise; but the others had caught the fever of his mood so that they dashed after him in a cheering charge.

Their run did not keep up long, however, for the walking was momently becoming harder. In the next hollow the pond had been smothered beneath a sand blanket, and the bushes were strangling in sand. In the next there were no bushes at all, only mats and tufts of wiry grass. On the

slopes the trees became fewer, the sand piled between them like drifted snow; in one place it had buried a clump so that only their tops showed, bush-like, above the creamy surface.

"There you can see what kind of place this would be to set up a landmark," Njal of Greenland observed, pointing at them. "In twenty years more it is likely the whole forest will be covered and the man who comes then will say that we lied because we told of trees being here. I doubt if we would be able to find much of the keel that Thorwald set up——"

"Then do not let us spend time looking for it," Alrek finished. And so completely had his mood taken possession of them, that they consented without argument; plodding on doggedly over the dunes that had become like yellow snow-banks, bare of a single tree, rounding in absolute baldness against the gray of the sky.

Gradually, feverish expectancy grew in them all. It was as though the vast shifting mass were a living monster, whose depredations they had seen, whose lair they were now approaching. They stopped in a hushed group when the last dune re-

vealed the beach sweeping down to the water. The scarred and furrowed ocean was another monster, still growling and showing his tusks at the wind giant.

Northward, the ocean was all they saw. Westward, they saw it over a yellow waste as the dunes sloped down to the Cape point. Southward, lay the land over which they had come; beyond it, the bay in which their ship rode at anchor. Eastward, unbroken drifts, unspotted beach—their silence ended in a cry:

"Yonder! Yonder is something washed ashore!"

All saw it, so plainly did it show against the sand,—something dark and motionless which the waves had flung up there out of their way. So large did it loom in the strange light that, as they went plunging and floundering toward it, some declared it to be a whale; and others, an overturned boat.

But the light on the Wonderstrand is a wondrous light. When they had raced over some hundred yards of beach, the dark object—instead of growing larger—dwindled suddenly from whale

Neither sound nor motion was on his blue lips.

size and boat size to the size of a human body. Involuntarily, they slackened their pace and a whisper went around: "It is one of the Skraellings, overtaken by the storm!"

Only Alrek shook his head and pressed forward. "That is no animal hide wrapping him," he said.

A dozen yards more brought him to the side of the stark form; he bent over it—and remained bent as though petrified with astonishment. When the others had reached him and looked, their voices went from them in a cry of amazement:

"The Huntsman!"

And the Huntsman's gigantic figure it was, sea-drenched and wave-battered, kelp snarled about his feet, starfish tangled in his hair. As he had lain upon the rock that winter day, so he lay here upon the sand,— flat on his back with his hands clasped over his breast; though now his eyes were closed, and neither sound nor motion was on his blue lips.

Doubting their senses, the explorers stared at him and then up and down the shore. Never was scene more yawningly empty; between the sweep of sand and the stretch of water he lay as though fallen from the sky.

CHAPTER VI

ABOUT THE STRANGE FIND ON KEEL CAPE

"I WOULD give much if he had not died until he had told us how he came hither," Gard remarked, presently.

"And what he was employing himself about in the north of Vinland when he set out to explore the country south of it!" Brand cried; while the Glib One added:

"Yes, and how it went with Hallad and the others he had with him!"

Then they became aware that Erlend's handsome brown face—three shades browner than his hair—was turned toward them in reproach. "It may be that Alrek will get the belief that a Greenlander's loyalty to his countrymen is somewhat shallow," he suggested.

In those days, disloyalty to a comrade was held a contemptible thing. Two of the three reddened; and Brand bent his tongue to apology.

"He knows that we care as much as any one. Eric of Brattahlid had the Huntsman for his steward, because they found pleasure in talking evil together about Christianity; but that was all the friend I ever heard of his having. It is understood that we will do him the favor to bury him, however."

Gard the Practical rubbed his ear. "That will not be easy unless we carry him far inland," he said. "If I am not much mistaken, this sand will move about like snow,—and I have heard that if dead men come uncovered and sleep cold, they are wont to get up and walk around to warm themselves."

A dozen of them crossed themselves involuntarily; and the Strong One squared his magnificent shoulders.

"Quickly will I proclaim my choice to carry him to the bay!"

"That would best be left unsaid until we see how heavy he is," Alrek advised. "Raise his other shoulder, Domar, and let us see how—One thing is that he is not yet stiff. Wait! What is this on his neck?" With his finger, he followed a cord

running from the grizzled beard across the motionless breast to lose itself in the shelter of the rigidly clasped hands. "It is a deerskin bag."

"I know he did not have it on when he went south!" Harald Grettirsson cried, excitedly.

And a chorus added; "Here is something of importance!"—"Something of value!" "To think of it then—" "Yes, to grasp it when he was drowning!"

Sitting back on his heels, Alrek gazed down at the figure curiously. "He has grasped the bag too close to move, but it would be possible to pry a finger into the top and see what is inside,—if you would allow it? He is your countryman." He glanced inquiringly at them as they stooped around him, their hands grasping their knees.

The Greenlanders looked down at him; then around at one another; then Brand spoke under his breath; "If you dare——"

"Dare?" Alrek's mouth curved disdainfully. Picking out the cord-ends from between the chill palms, he undid the knot that fastened the mouth of the bag and inserted a thumb and forefinger. "A chain," he said as they closed upon something;

then, as they began to draw it out, "What a chain!"

All echoed him: "*What* a chain!"

For it was of shining gold, set here and there with a rough-cut gem; while its girth was that of his largest finger, and it unfolded itself coil after coil to the length of his arm. What a keepsake to bring out of a waste peopled only by wild men! Devouring it with hungry eyes, they drew closer; and Rane Thin-Nose put out a hand to feel of it, at the same time sending an apologetic glance toward the rigid face.

As he did so, the drawn eyelids rose slowly and silently as curtains; and the Huntsman's small evil eyes looked back at him. Rane's hand was withdrawn as though it had encountered fire; and the circle fell back, screaming. Even the Sword-Bearer was startled enough to drop the chain, as the eyes rolled in his direction and remained turned on him in a baleful glare.

Through the blue lips came a voice, so faint that it seemed to be one of the smothered voices which cry through the roar of the surf; "You would rob me?"

At that the circle rallied indignantly, shouting, "We would *not!*" "It was our intention—" "You need not reproach us for—" "We thought——"

"Put it back."

Alrek hesitated, his face coloring with resentment. Then he asked himself of what use it was to argue with a piece of driftwood, and gave up justification with a shrug. While the rest spent their breath wrathfully, he complied in silence. When the last knot was tied—and not before—the eyes left him to roll around the circle.

"Swear—" the voice said faintly.

Before the glare they shrank in spite of themselves, fluttering like birds around a snake; until Erlend said, with quiet haughtiness:

"There is no need for us to swear that we will not rob you."

The voice was so faint that they barely made out the words; "Swear—to keep it secret. On the edge of your blades!"

"I suppose he has the right to ask it," Erlend gave judgment after a while. "It was his secret and we thrust ourselves in. It seems to me that it

is his right? " He looked at the Sword-Bearer with questioning eyebrows.

No one ever disputed the decisions of the Amiable One in matters of honor. Alrek answered by unsheathing his sword, with another shrug of his shoulders.

Drawing each a knife from his belt, they grasped them by the blades so that the sharp edges cut red grooves in their bare palms. Holding the knives aloft thus, they spoke the oath together; the Huntsman's eyes telling them off, one by one. When he had come to the last—little Olaf the Fair twisting his face to keep back tears of pain—his eyes stopped and settled slowly into their unwinking stare; but that they were less dull than fish-eyes, his stark figure would have differed little from the myriad fish bodies strewed upon the sand.

Though they rattled their weapons blusteringly in putting them up, a kind of panic chill crept over the band. The stare was so awful in its dumb evilness; and the scene was so weirdly desolate,—the stretch of bleak sky, the sweep of naked shore, and the breakers' unending boom out of which stifled voices seemed trying vainly to call. The lad who

was called the Hare—alike for fleetness and for timidity—voiced the feeling in a quavering outburst:

"Let us leave him! I do not believe he is alive at all. I believe a troll hides in him and uses his mouth to speak with. I know evil will come of this. Let us leave him." He plucked nervously at Alrek's coat. "Come on!"

Alrek was strung high enough to be irritated by the clutch. "Keep off!" he ordered, jerking himself free. "It is no lie about you that you are cowardly, if you would desert a shipmate!" Then regaining possession of his cloak, he regained possession of his temper, and spoke quietly; "If we get some big branches and make a litter with our mantles, it will not be difficult to get him to the bay. It seemed to me that you were all eager in having him alive to tell you news?"

If it had not been for that hope, it is doubtful if the twenty would have toiled to bring such a burden over the sand-hills; and it is certain that the sailors had this end in view as they rubbed the Huntsman's limbs and poured ale down his throat. Had they been polishing a knife or oiling a lock,

they could scarcely have been more business-like or less tender.

"As soon as he gets strength to talk he should be able to tell tidings worth hearing," they said to one another when at last they left him rolled in skins and went about their preparations for returning to the ship, a rift having come in the gray toward the west.

The main difference between their attitude and that of their juniors was that they felt merely dislike for the Huntsman, while for the one-and-twenty he had the fascination of fear. To them, his eyes were twin demons keeping guard from their cave doors over the treasure bag below. It is safe to say that they never lost him out of their minds through all the bustle of going on board and resettling themselves, as they awaited a surer sign of the Storm King's reformation.

With the sunset, the rift in the gray widened. Thrym, the giant who herds the clouds, drove the hulking masses northward, lagging from their own weight. In the clearing west, the sun dropped golden behind a jagged bar; and while the rosy glory of it was still in the southern sky, the moon

looked out of the east. To a rousing cheer, the Wind-Raven shook out her storm-beaten plumage and skimmed away over the silvering waves. The change was so grateful that Alrek was able to shake off depression one time more; while the loungers on the benches were noisy with satisfaction.

"Never was there a better time to experience the Wonderstrands!" they jubilated afresh, as the curving stretch of shining dunes pushed itself into their vision.

Passing that curve was little less than an experience; for the bend of the shore made it ever appear as though a cape lay just ahead, yet the cape ever receded as they approached, a flying point that could never be caught.

"Certainly it makes the world seem a place of strange wonders!" Faste the Fat marveled, when they had sat a long time watching it in silent fascination. "It makes one curious about everything. If the Huntsman would only speak now and tell us what he has seen, this would be a good time to amuse ourselves with a tale."

"How do you know that he has seen any-

thing?" sneered a harsh voice—harsh for all its faintness—from the pile of skins upon the forecastle.

They wheeled so eagerly that the ship rocked under them. "Are you ready to tell the tidings you have seen?" "Will you tell us about—?" "Tell about the south country, Huntsman." "Did you see any Skraellings?" "No, tell us first how you came here—" "Yes, your adventure—" "Yes, yes!" "We beg of you—" "Go on! Go on!"

They were all speaking at once now, boys and men, and their greed proved their downfall. For, the clamor reaching the helmsman on the after-deck, he descended with unusual agility and waddled toward them.

"If you are going to talk to any one, you talk to me, your chief," he commanded; "and tell me what you have done with the boat and the men I lent you."

The Huntsman's manners gained little at sight of his superior. "I do not see that *I* have done anything with them," he answered sullenly, "because the boat went to pieces on a sand-bar and

Rann drew Svipdag and Black Thord down to her. It is seen that I saved you the best man of the three."

"Four men were in the boat when you started out on that foolish trip," the helmsman caught him up. "Biorn's foster-son is worth speaking about; what have you done with him?"

The blood settled in the Huntsman's sunken cheeks as water in a hollow. "Is the boy of so much importance that I must carve his rune on a separate stick?" he snarled. "What else could he be than drowned? Is it likely that Valkyrias came down for him? I think you are a fool. If Freydis, Eric's daughter, had not married you for your wealth and sent you out here after more, you would never have had manhood to set foot on a ship. *You* my chief! You can think what you like; I will not answer you another word." He flung himself over on his face in one of the black sulks no man had ever yet sounded; his officer's threats might as well have been addressed to the mast.

At last the fat helmsman was forced to pause to take in breath, standing puffing and glaring and tugging at his belt. And it was this unpropitious

moment which his roving eyes took to remind him of Alrek's existence. The Sword-Bearer felt the gaze when it fell, and shut one eye in an expressive wink at Brand; nor were his forebodings without foundation.

The helmsman let his recovered breath go from him in a snort. "You! What are you doing here? Did I not order that you should be shut up for the rest of the voyage?"

Alrek unclosed his eye to gaze out of the pair in respectful surprise. "I?" he inquired. "Was it not your intention to free me when you ordered all hands to the oars?"

Before the Weathercock found adequate words he had stamped three times in uncouth capers of rage; when he did find them, however, they came with such force that they burst the buckle off his belt.

"Go back!" he wound up in a bellow. "Go back, and do not dare come forth again until I haul you before Karlsefne. If I were your chief, I would hang you!"

For once, exasperation got the better of Alrek's soldier training. He looked the fat figure up and

down as he arose. "You would not need to take the trouble," he retorted. "If you were my chief, I would hang myself."

He heard applauding laughter from his mates as he walked away, simultaneously with a roar from the helmsman, and after that a confusion of sounds; but his mind was too full of bitterness to leave any room for curiosity. It roused him with a start when the solitude in which Fat Faste was reinstalling him was disturbed by a second consignment of captives,—Brand with torn clothes and flashing eyes; at his heels, little Olaf striving to quench a bleeding nose as he panted with unquenched partizanship; back of him Gard the Ugly, made uglier by a swollen lip; and behind the three, Strong Domar, a purple lump on his forehead and breathless delight in his voice as he shouted the explanation over the others' heads:

"I knocked him down, Alrek, as sure as I stand here! He tried to cuff Brand for laughing at you, and I laid him flat before Lodin could lay hold of me,—and he will have to come before Karlsefne with a black eye! Think of it!"

Apparently Alrek did think of it, for he stared

for the space of a minute before he spoke. "You struck your chief!" he repeated at last.

The Strong One chortled with relish. "*And* blacked his eye! It will be shut tight, I know it will,—and he thinks so much about making a fine appearance before the Lawman! And maybe his nose will swell also, and—" He broke off abruptly as the meaning of Alrek's expression came home to him; and his freckled face reddened. "Now I forgot that you are soldier-bred. I suppose that in the Earl's camp they would not call it a jest to knock down a chief?"

The Sword-Bearer leaned back on his bale of fur with a long-drawn yawn. "They would not be likely to call it anything," he said drily, "for it could not happen there at all."

As he said nothing more in congratulation, it was rather a sulky group that the torches left to darkness when the last walrus-hide knot was tied.

CHAPTER VII

CONCERNING THORFINN KARLSEFNE, THE LAWMAN

And that night was as long as two nights; and the sunrise into which it melted lasted until noon; and the day which finally grew out of that sunrise had no end whatever! Apparently, the Weathercock had managed to tie walrus thongs around Time's ankles also.

Glimpses of banks, caught through the doorway, showed when they turned from the highroad of the ocean up the river-lane which led into the Vinland bay; but the banks kept on unraveling like witch's weaving that has no end. They had turned their attention from watching the landscape to robbing a fish keg, when the drone of voices on the deck above broke suddenly into shouts:

"A boat! Coming from behind that island!" "Who—" "—thralls, the two in white—"

"But the man in blue?" "Karlsefne is wont to wear blue——" "By the Hammer, I believe it is the Lawman himself!"

If cheers rose from the forecastle, silence fell on the foreroom. Eager as they were to reach camp, to run upon this portion of it in midstream was little less than startling. The face of every Greenlander confirmed Domar's fervent gasp:

"Now I am thankful that Karlsefne is not my chief!"

Into Alrek's quiet came a kind of constraint. "Other men wear blue mantles," he suggested. "Hold your tongues and listen."

Crouching on rope-coils and piles of fur, they held their breath as well as their tongues while they tried to separate the tumult into meanings; the scuffle of feet on the deck above was like a blur over all other sounds. But finally the feet rushed down the steps; there was a lull in which could be heard the sound of oars backing water; then, through the quiet a new voice, deep and kindly:

"Greeting and welcome, friends! Tell me before anything else if you are all here, sound and whole?"

The prisoners' mouths shaped one word as they gazed into one another's faces: "Karlsefne!"

How thinly and sputteringly the Weathercock's voice fell on their ears after that! "All here, Lawman! And all sound,—saving this eye of mine which has met with a mishap of which I will tell you later."

Very likely he rambled on with his wonted long windedness, but the five eavesdropping in the foreroom heard no more. The throng that had surged forward receded noisily; and through the rift the prisoners had a glimpse of the gunwale and a sinewy blue-clad form rising beside the fat helmsman like a tree beside a bush, a towering mightfull figure with a face of rugged beauty framed in locks of iron gray. Even after the rift had closed up again they crouched motionless, staring at the shifting backs and straining their ears for tones of that deep voice, until—jangling through it like clattering pottery—came the helmsman's lament:

"But ask not what success we have had, Lawman, for I will tell you without delay that the plan you had most at heart has been marred past mend-

ing! By no fault of mine, but through the bloodthirstiness of your brother's son; who has not only thrown your commands aside, but has kindled outlawry in the heart of every boy on board, who would otherwise be obedient to my——"

Brand got on his bound feet—no one knows how—and on them got to the door.

"That is not true, though you or others say it!" he shouted; and when his leader stopped out of sheer amazement and every one turned, gaping, he followed his voice through the door. "We endure him altogether against our will. To obey him is a disgrace to all with manhood in them. Domar made his eye black——"

"Yes, that is true," bellowed Domar. Followed by Gard and little Olaf, he in his turn worked his way to the door, where a sudden lurch of the ship caught them and rolled them in a struggling heap almost to Karlsefne's feet; when the crew began to laugh and the Weathercock began to accuse and the rebels began to deny.

Looking after them Alrek's lips curled in soldier scorn; that gave way to amusement when the clamor ended abruptly at a single word from the deep voice,

and he had a glimpse of Brand's fiery locks drooping like captured flags. But after a moment, he turned and stretching his bound arms across a cask, hid his face upon them.

"Whatever they do, they can not serve him so badly as I have done. Certainly I can find no fault with his act if he hangs me up like a sheep-killing dog, for little better has my service been," he murmured; and lay there with his face hidden until the jar of Hjalmar's heavy foot brought him suddenly upright.

"Karlsefne sends for you," the Thick-Skulled announced in his wonted roar; then, coming close to cut the thongs, he spoke in hoarse whispers; "Hear great wonders! Your luck has not quite shown its heels, after all. It has happened that the Lawman also has seen the Skraellings! The day after you met the one on the Cape, a host of them appeared before the Vinland booths,—to see, it is likely, if the others had your mind toward them. But Karlsefne made so plain his good intentions that they went away after doing nothing worse than stare. And yesterday they came again, with bundles of fur which they traded with much friend-

liness. It is his belief that they also have young fire-heads among them so that they understand how little value is to be put upon——"

Stretching out his freed arms, the Sword-Bearer gripped Hjalmar's hand to the point of crushing. "You make my heart merry in my breast!" he breathed.

"Yes, certainly; I am in high spirits also," Hjalmar assented, returning the pressure. "It is an exceedingly useful thing for you. But see to it that you bear yourself boldly as a hawk; and keep it all the time before his mind that no real harm has been done."

Alrek began suddenly to laugh. "It may be that I would better tell him that he owes me thanks for sending the Skraellings to him?"

"That might have no small power," the Thick-Skulled responded gravely; and Alrek laughed again, as he caught at the huge shoulder to steady himself in rising upon his stiff legs.

If the shoulder had been Grimkel's, the mouth belonging to it would have advised differently. During all the time that the helmsman was bewailing the evils to come out of such rashness, and Karl-

sefne was courteously explaining how luck had warded off such evils, the old seaman's weather eye had scanned the sky of his chief's face with deepening gravity. Now his speculations broke out into words.

"If the boy tries to make light of his disobedience because it ended luckily, the Lawman will spare him neither in words nor deeds," he muttered to himself; and the impulse came to him to try to push through the crowd pressing him mastward and impart this prognostication to the Sword-Bearer. But even as he moved to carry out his kindly intention, the boy's erect red-cloaked figure appeared in the doorway of the foreroom and it was too late to do anything.

Though his dress of blue was merchant garb and the staff in his hand was a farmer's symbol, the face of Karlsefne was the face of a law-giver. Above the beard of iron gray his mouth showed firm-lipped as a mouth of stone, and the gaze of the steel-bright eyes under the bushy brows was such as none with guilt in their hearts might sustain. Meeting it, the Sword-Bearer's eyes fell and the blood was drawn to his cheeks, and he came

forward and bent his knee before the Lawman.

Hard as measured steel were Karlsefne's measured words: "For a long time I have been watching to know whether you deserved favor or starkness, and held my hand from you lest it deal unjustly. I thought, long ago, that I smelled hot blood which would one day break out and sweep away all bounds. Now that day has come, and the worst things I have thought of you are proved the true things."

As he bowed his head under the rebuke, Alrek's teeth cut a blood-line on his lip; but he attempted no defense. For the space of a second it seemed to Grimkel that the Lawman's face showed surprise.

Yet his voice was even sterner when he spoke again. "They are no less true things because good fortune has enabled me to ward off the damage which would otherwise have been caused by your deed. If you are at all versed in camp ways, you know that this happening does not make you any less liable to punishment."

Rising from his knee, the young Sword-Bearer faced him without fear. "My fate is for you to

decide over, kinsman, according to your pleasure," he said with soldier submissiveness.

Then there was no question whatever about Karlsefne's surprise. After a moment's silence, he spoke slowly; "I think it best to hear first from your own mouth about this happening."

"I have no excuse why you should withhold your anger from me, yet I would not have you believe that I wished the thing to happen," Alrek answered. "When I set out for the light, my one thought was to get honor with you by finding out the news you wanted; and I think I should have remembered your order if the Skraelling had been where I first looked for him. But after I had given him up I saw him suddenly, hiding in the shadow; and something in me cried out that he was aiming and—and I have not been wont to jump backward when I saw a foe. Yet I ask you to believe that I wished least of anything to hinder your plans."

A while the steel-keen eyes probed him; but he did not flinch. "That is not in every respect as the helmsman relates the story," Karlsefne remarked at last.

"That is very likely," Alrek replied, "for the helmsman knows nothing whatever about the matter." Whereupon the helmsman let his stored-up breath go from him in a snort.

A dozen seamen endeavored suddenly to hide laughter under fits of coughing; but the Lawman said gravely: "Nevertheless, I now see that there is truth in the other things he told me about your behavior toward him;" then turned away and stood a long time pondering, his hands gripping his silver-shod staff, his half-closed eyes resting on the group of gaping boys. And gazing at them, he seemed to forget the Sword-Bearer in a new problem.

"Here are more rebels," he said to the helmsman, with a sweep of his staff. "Little order will there be in camp if they are turned loose on it in no better state of mind. How is it your intention to deal with them?"

The Weathercock shifted his weight peevishly; he was tired of standing; and his mind was upset within him; and he wanted besides to get back to his ale horn. "Since they are free-born, it seems that I can not even give them the flogging they de-

serve," he snapped, "but if they were thralls, I would drown them."

"It may be then that you would be willing that I should offer them to come under my rule?" Karlsefne suggested; and went on to say more in an undertone.

Astonishment opened the helmsman's eyes at first; then, slowly, he wrinkled into a fat smile. At last he reached out and grasped Karlsefne's hand.

"If you will rid me of the twenty plagues, who are turning me thin, I will feel as though you had given me twenty marks of gold," he declared. Whereupon the Lawman turned to the group of blank faces.

"Now this is my offer to you," he said, "that you part from the rest of the Greenlanders and form yourselves into a band and build your own booth and choose one of your own number to rule over you."

The faces lighted in ecstasy,—then gloomed in unbelief. Brand spoke for all when he inquired timidly:

"Is this a *punishment?*"

"It is not a reward," Karlsefne answered; and

for a moment his gaze sharpened so that the Red One winced under it. "If I did not believe that it is because you know no better that you act thus, there would be hard things in store for you. I take this way to show you why lawfulness is needful. Yet is there no trick to it; all I have promised shall be fulfilled,—and more. You shall have your own table if you can furnish it; your own boat if you can build it; in every way like men——"

They thought his pause the end, and burst into jubilant chorus; "It will not take us long to know what to answer to this!"

But he raised his hand for silence. "Answer nothing until you have heard the whole. If you form yourselves upon the manner of men, so must you also bear men's burdens. You must furnish your share of hunters and fishers and of workers in the fields; and you must do your share of guarding against outside foes or lawlessness within. Even as Thorvard, here, and Snorri and Biorn, answer to me for the behavior of their following, so must your chief answer for you——"

"Yes! Yes!" they cried eagerly.

But he lifted his hand again; his measured

tones became like tolling bells. "Think well! I speak not in jest. If you accept, I take you in grim earnest. You may not have men's liberty without men's care, and I shall hold you like men to your word though the matter cause death itself. Think well!"

They did pause; his manner was impressive enough to insure that. But in a moment, Brand flung back his red locks daringly.

"Much should we lack in manhood if we would refuse a fair offer! Take our word!"

Every one of the twenty echoed him wildly. "Take our word!"

"It is taken," Karlsefne said gravely; then bent his gaze on the Red One. "It appears likely that you will be the chosen head, since you seem always to speak for your comrades?"

Brand flushed with delight. But before he could answer, Domar spoke bluntly:

"I do not see in what Brand is above the rest of us Greenlanders. I raise my voice for Alrek Ingolfsson."

"Alrek Ingolfsson, by all means!" Erland seconded; and Brand joined him generously.

In another moment, all were shouting, "Alrek! Alrek!"

Plainly, this was something the Lawman had not expected. "Alrek?" he repeated in surprise. "Yet I do not know that it would not be a punishment to answer for such a band!" Turning, he looked again where the Sword-Bearer stood with folded arms, awaiting his sentence.

Perhaps with mouth firm-set and troubled eyes he looked more than ever like his father. Old Grimkel's watchful gaze saw the Lawman's hardness break up like Greenland ice before a warm land wind. Taking a slow step forward, he laid his hands upon the square young shoulders and looked long into the brown young face.

"Since you left in the spring," he said, "a son was born to me, but I swear I do not love him more than I love you when that look is on you, bringing back my brother and my boyhood and the time before our ways parted." His voice softened to very grave gentleness. "Since you did not mean offense toward me, I will take none; and you shall accept this chiefship and use it to prove what nature is in you. All I have of love and honor lies ready for

your gaining,—it will not gladden you more than me if you are strong enough to take them. Will you accept the test?"

He held out his hand, and the Sword-Bearer grasped it in both of his and looked him full in the face, his eyes in a golden glow. "I accept the test,—and I give you thanks for it from the bottom of my heart," he said.

END OF PART FIRST

PART SECOND

ALREK'S CHAMPIONS

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE HALL OF THE VINLAND CHAMPIONS

"WHETHER you think so or not, I know that Gudrid would not keep milk in a fish-pail," the Bull's voice rose above the racket.

There was not a little racket to surmount, for it was rising time at the new band's new booth. In the high-seat that had been built for him midway the length of the hall, the red-cloaked chief occupied the interval before breakfast with rune-carving; but that was the only employment which was being carried on in silence. Whistling boys were lacing their high boots along the benches right and left of the high-seat; grumbling boys were just turning out of the bunks behind those benches; jeering boys were throwing bedclothes at the sluggards, and disputing boys were clattering bowls and trenchers on the tables which stood on either side the fire. One of these table-boys was the short and chesty Bull, sniffing hostilely at the

milk he was pouring; and the head of the division was Brand, the long and loose-jointed.

Over a platter of cold venison, he frowned on his scullions. "Gudrid has nothing to do with this house," he snubbed the faultfinder; then, in peremptory aside, "Olaf, keep that door shut! Do you think it is warm outside?"

"Do you think that any one who eats your cooking needs to be told that Gudrid did not do it?" retorted the Bull, refusing to be snubbed.

A sigh came out of Erlend's handsome mouth as he looked up from hunting a lost button among the pine branches of the floor. "Ah, Gudrid! After that last meal she invited me to take in their booth, eating here has been like living on seaweed!"

Brand's frown took on an edge of scorn. "Fussers! Go and live in Gudrid's house! It may be that she would allow you to crawl into the cradle with the baby. Yesterday the grumbling was because I put my head out of the door to look at a dog-fight and the bread got a little burned. If I were as womanish as the rest of you, I would braid my hair and put on skirts!"

Still bending over his rune-carving, the young chief spoke with a drawl: "Here is something worth a hearing! Is it in truth your opinion that there is the most manfulness in you?"

Surprise took the head-cook a little aback; then defiance took him a long way forward, flourishing his red mane. "Yes, I think so. You also found fault with the bread, for all your Viking training. I think I am the most hardy man here."

When Alrek's knife had cut another rune upon his stick, he straightened deliberately. "Yesterday," he explained, "Karlsefne gave the chiefs the advice to pick out each week five men who should have it for their sole service to keep the camp in fire-wood——"

A prolonged groan interrupted him; of all the burdens of housekeeping, fuel-getting weighed the most heavily.

"——and he bade me send the hardiest man in our booth. I intended Domar to go, but now I see that Brand Erlingsson is the man to do it."

"Hail to the chief!" yelled Strong Domar.

And Brand's flame of defiance sank in ashes of sulkiness; and from the others came shouts of laughter.

"He will wish he was back at kitchen work!" "Tree-chopping is the least interesting—" "And the weather is such that wood lasts the shortest time—" "Still Karlsefne is lacking payment—" "Never will we get to cutting timber for the ship!"

The Hare made a pettish flourish with the knife he was using to trim away the rags from his garments. "Who wants to prepare for anything so far in the future? Why will you, Olaf, open that door? What I should be glad of is a chance to exercise myself for the spring games. Since we began this way of living, I have not had one race worth talking about."

"I should be thankful if we could get a chance to go north where the big game is," Erlend said with a disapproving glance at the empty walls. "All the booty we have to show is the Skraelling hatchet, and Alrek has the habit of carrying that in his belt. Many hunting journeys will be required to make this booth equal to the

others in outfittings. Let your eyes run over it and then think of Karlsefne's!"

Thinking, they were silent for a little, gazing around at the great room which even in the fire-glow showed so baldly white with newness. Karlsefne's walls were decorated with bears' heads and eagles' claws and antler-racks of shining weapons; and Karlsefne's benches were covered with rich furs, and his high-seat had velvet cushions stuffed with eider-down.

"Alrek, when is it your intention to take the time to get furnishings?" Erlend besought.

The chief shook his brown head steadily. "Not until we get out of the debt which we got into to build this booth," he answered, and closed the opening discussion by putting aside his rune-stick and rising. "Now it seems to me that you are all looking too far into the future. I should be content if I could get something to eat. Who has gone after the fish? And what is the reason that he is not back again?"

As head-cook, Brand answered him, though sulkily: "Gard has gone after the fish, and it is high time that he was back again."

"That is what I have been trying to do, look for him," little Olaf the Fair spoke up for the first time, in aggrieved tones. And secure at last from interference, he flung the door open to the nipping January wind. "No, I see nothing of him—but I do hear the snow crunch!"

"It is certainly time," Brand blustered.

Nevertheless he bent his lank length over the fire with recovered good-humor; and greater alacrity came into the movements of those who were not yet dressed, while those who were, turned toward the door, gibes at each tongue's end.

The nature of their greeting changed, however, when Gard the Ugly had stamped into the room and they saw the size of the catch swinging at his side. Waking, their sleeping appetites cried out in alarm:

"Only three!" "Go into the hands of the Troll—" "—gone long enough to get thirty!" "What in the Fiend's name has come to the fishing?"

Tossing his fish to the clamoring cooks, Gard was a long time pulling off his fur-lined gloves

before he answered: "Nothing has come to the fishing."

"What has come to *you* then?" Brand demanded.

After a while Gard said gruffly: "I forgot to take any more."

"*Forgot!*" echoed the chorus; and Erlend laid his plump hands on the Ugly One's shoulders and shook him good-naturedly.

"Are you asleep?" he inquired.

Gard pushed off his brown cloak and with it his questioner. "Since I can feel your grasp, I am not asleep. I think I have seen Hallad's ghost."

"What!" cried the chorus; and Domar, mistaking it for a joke, burst into his uproarious laugh. He stopped abruptly when he found that he was alone, and Gard spoke without further interruption:

"It happened that the first set of lines I stopped at had been robbed, so I was obliged to go across the river, which is what makes me rather late. Over there I had pulled up three fish when I heard a noise on the bank and looked around. Some evergreen trees hang down their branches

there, and they are white with snow; he had on a white cloak that mixed him with them, at first. But suddenly I saw him looking out at me, as near as that bowl. His eyes were very wide open, and his face was white as milk. It may be that he would have spoken to me, but I did not wait to see."

"And therein you showed sense," Domar breathed in sympathy. But again he was on the unpopular side, for Ketil began to hoot:

"If you had waited, it is most likely you would have found out that you are a simpleton. Why should Hallad be dressed in white like a slave? He wore green when he went on his death-journey. Is it likely that Ran keeps new cloaks for drowned people?"

"Certainly, I think you are asleep after all!" Erlend laughed; which was the signal for a flight of chaff until Brand at his fish-fork endangered the peace by scoffing:

"I think you are lying."

To have said that to some of the band would have been to bring on a fight to the death, and many caught breath apprehensively before they remembered that this was one of the points about

which Gard's thrall-blood gave him feelings different from theirs. He answered without resentment:

"I am not apt to lie when nothing is to be gained by it. I call Thor as witness that I have spoken the truth!" His oath he directed toward the chief, who had returned to his high-seat and from there listened intently to what passed.

But in the very act of nodding, Alrek Sword-Bearer broke off to ponder; and in the midst of pondering, he began to grin. "If you want to know my belief," he said, "it is that you saw the Weathercock's thrall, Tunni."

Instantly the chorus seconded him. "That is certainly the truth of the matter!" "Their hair is of the same color—" "—the branches hid its shortness—" "and explains the slaves' cloak——"

"And explains why his look was fear-full," Alrek added, "if, as I think, it was he who robbed the lines to save himself the trouble of going farther. He would think his hide in danger of a flogging——"

"Which it will get!" roared Gard; whereupon the chorus redoubled its delighted jeering.

This one time, however, the Ugly One's patience had a limit. Gradually his swarthy face turned mottled red; slowly a gleam came into the dull eyes above the high cheek-bones. Suddenly his voice rumbled through theirs: "If any of you tell this so that outsiders make derision, you will feel the edge of my knife."

They knew then that they had gone as far as was safe. When each one of them had spoken one gibe more to show that he dared to, there was a lull, of which Erlend the Amiable took advantage to make a tactful suggestion.

"I shall think those fish are ghosts if I do not get some of them between my teeth before long," he observed. And lo! ghosts and threats were, of a sudden, things of the past.

"Get to your places," commanded the head-cook, sweeping them aside that he might place before his chief the first portion of the crisp and rosy dish, savory with garlic and sweet with its own freshness.

There was an eager scrambling of feet, a joyful clattering of brass-hilted knives, a flurry of half-spoken requests; and after that all

noise gave way to a pleasant munching sound, enforced now and then by a contented sigh or a long-drawn "Ah—h!" of satisfaction.

A mumble of applause greeted the Bull when, having licked the last morsel from his fingers and pushed back his bowl, he looked around to say, stretching: "I should like to see the man who could make me go back to the old way of living!"

CHAPTER IX

ABOUT THE HUNTSMAN AND THE BOY WHO WAS DROWNED

To keep such a band supplied with food was an occupation in itself.

"Certainly I begin to believe there is truth in the things women say about a boy's stomach being like the bottomless horn which Thor tried to drink dry!" Brand jested. With his week of fuel-duty far behind him and a day's hunting immediately before him, it was a light heart that beat under his deerskin tunic as he followed his chief and the Ugly One out of the booth door.

On the threshold the hunters paused to call back in mock admonition: "See to it this time that the meat is hung where the dogs can not get it—" "Watch Njal, if you do not want the cheese cut with the garlic knife—" "Put a bone in the Bull's mouth! If the Skraellings should

come while he is bellowing like that, they would get more scared than they were at Karlsefne's bull."

Then Brand shut the door upon the counter-chaff, and the three began to burrow for their skees in the pile beside the house.

Trees—such trees as Greenland never dreamed of—rose snow-laden behind the booth, and before it a sweep of snow-buried meadow sloped away to beaches of white sand; for the little settlement was built across a neck of land that reached down between a river and a great lake-like bay. But the lads went neither forward nor back when at last they were shod for the trip, but turned to their left and moved across the camp toward the river bank.

It was so early in the day that no wind had yet arisen to stir the fleecy snow-blanket which the night had spread, and to look up a sunbeam was to look up a track of swirling star-dust. From the provision shed next their booth the first camp dog to leave night quarters had only just emerged, yawning, and dragging his hind legs after him. Passing the great log-built sleeping houses with

gray banners flying from every smoke hole, they caught a rattle of dishes and a hum of jovial voices which told pleasantly of the breakfast hour. Farther on, they overtook the thralls carrying the pails of milk to the dairy, and had—for a wink of time—a glimpse of Gudrid herself. Looking out to hurry the milkers she stood an instant in the dairy door, tall and straight and deep-bosomed, carrying her baby on her hip as though he were a doll. For all the white matron's cap upon her sunny locks, her face showed young and flower-fresh as she turned to smile at them. When they had lost sight of her, Brand spoke reflectively:

"Women are as helpless in hardships as a rowan tree in the open; but if they must be in the world, let them be like that."

"It is a good thing to be in a country where there are but seven women," Gard assented.

What Alrek would have said no one knows; for they reached just then a corner of the last booth, and rounding it, encountered Karlsefne returning from an early search for a favorite hound which he now carried in his arms, badly torn by fighting.

THE HUNTSMAN AND THE BOY

As he was coming out of the snow-mantled grove, so he might have been coming out of the finest trading booth in Norway, so splendid were his garments of blue, so rich the silvery furs that bordered them. On the iron of his hair and his beard and his bushy brows, the morning light was sparkling like rime frost; and a glint of kindly humor lighted his deep-set eyes as they fell upon the approaching three.

"I salute the Chief of the Vinland Champions and his men!" he greeted them. "We old bones need to look to ourselves when young blood is on the trail so early."

Drawing up his soldierly form in salute, the Sword-Bearer replied that young blood had need to stir early when it had young appetites to provide for.

"That is true," the Lawman assented; then added politely: "Yours is certainly a hard-working household, chief. I hope your debt to me does not lie heavy on your shoulders?"

Involuntarily the Champions of Vinland exchanged wistful glances, and their chief paused to consider his answer.

"Why, the truth of the case is this," he said at last. "It is only a little time that is left over after we have got the food and fuel which are needed to keep us going; and since we have to spend that time in working out our debt to you, there is left no chance whatever to employ ourselves with accomplishments or skin-hunting. That some have found this hard can not be denied, yet it should not be thought either that our knees are in any way weakening under us."

"Ah?" said Karlsefne, and stood a while stroking the head of the hound that had just strength enough to lick his hand. Presently he spoke with much graciousness: "It is an old saying that 'necessities should be taken into consideration.' Let us therefore look upon the debt as paid. In a short time to come you will find your hands full with ship-building. I expect that your boat will stand to Vinland's aid and strengthen us greatly, when it is ready."

So unexpected was the turn that for a time it took their breath away, but at last their chief recovered enough of his to answer gratefully:

"To let the matter rest so would be a great

help for us, Karlsefne. If we do not serve Vinland well, it will not be for lack of trying."

"That is well-spoken, as was to be expected from you," Karlsefne made courteous return; whereupon they shook hands all around with the ceremony which becomes a dealing between chiefs.

After they had parted from the Lawman, however, and were skimming through the grove which was the back dooryard of the little settlement, dignity gave way to delight. Reaching the trail that zigzagged up the bluff, they streaked down it cheering, and cheering slid far along the sparkling track of the river.

Though black rifts yawned here and there in the middle of the stream, the ice within a hundred paces of the shores was as solid as a rock and as smooth-carpeted as a floor, a shining temptation to any with red blood in his veins. From sliding they went to racing, cleaving the air like swallows. There is no knowing when they would have stopped if they had not been halted, on turning a bend in the river, by the sight of smoke curling up from behind in a low white bank ahead of them.

In the same breath Brand cried: "Skrael-

lings!" and Gard cried, "Dwarfs!" At which Alrek repeated the last word with lifted eyebrows: "*Dwarfs?*"

Somewhat shamefacedly, Gard explained himself: "I said that in jest. It came into my mind how Biorn Herjulfsson's men used to think that this land was inhabited by them. But the rocks are not large enough here. It is more likely to be Skraellings."

"It is most likely to be some of our own hunters," Alrek dissented, "but it lies on our shoulders to investigate. We will leave our skees on the ice and creep close to the bank and listen; the tongue they speak, and their voices, will tell us something. If they are Skraellings, remember to behave well toward them, but on no account allow them to get hold of your knives. Karlsefne would blame the man strongly who should give them a weapon."

The plan was simple enough to carry out, for the shore was flat at the river's edge. With a sudden freak of perverseness, Brand decided that doffing his skees was unnecessary, and edged his way up sidewise, the six-foot runners threatening

more than once to trip his neighbor. But they did not have to get very close to hear, as the place was still and the voices loud.

Their first expression was disappointment, for the language spoken was nothing more novel than Norse, and the voice was the hoarse one of the vagabond Greenlander known as Faste the Fat.

"——they are contented with no better excitement than hunting," he was saying.

"And to get only such wealth as is to be got from trading with Skraellings," added the grumble of Ale the Greedy.

In the faces of the eavesdroppers disappointment began to give place to curiosity.

"Better two followers like you than twenty cinder-biters," returned a third voice, harsh and sneering for all the flattery of the words. "I have not brought my news forward in the hall because I do not want the chiefs to take the power out of my hands. I have told only men who——"

Snap! Snap! Recognizing the Huntsman, Brand had moved involuntarily; and his cumbersome foot-gear came in contact with a bush and the dry twigs broke. Before the lads could more than

straighten, the giant form of Thorhall appeared at the top of the bank, his knife bare in his hand.

"Prying again!" he snarled, in his small eyes so evil a look that Gard's fingers began instinctively to shape runes against charm-spells, and Alrek's deliberate voice became fiercely swift as at a challenge.

"A man must be doing something which he expects to have pried into who makes his council-hall in the wastes," he retorted. "We thought the smoke must be from a Skraelling cook-fire, and crept up to see."

The Huntsman tossed his knife back to its case, and his anger sheathed itself in contempt. "If a man in the wastes is unable to escape the meddling of fools, what would he not have to endure who remained in camp?"

To that there did not appear to be any satisfactory answer; and as he remained standing with folded arms, plainly awaiting their departure, there did not seem to be any adequate reason for staying. The only revenge they could take was to move away in the most deliberate manner possible and mutter scathing comment to one another,

feeling all the while his eyes like knife-blades in their backs.

"It has something to do with that bag of his." "He is trying to get another ship-load of fools to accompany him south—" "If he thinks the Weathercock will lend him another boat—" "None but the scum will listen to him—" "I wonder if Ale and the Fat One were ashamed to show themselves?" "Let us turn around suddenly when we get to this bend and see if they are not all looking after us."

Agreeing, they reached the bend and turned,—but it was a day of surprises. Though each boy would have taken oath that he felt that gaze on him as he wheeled, neither Huntsman nor followers were anywhere to be seen. And as they stood staring, Gard uttered a smothered cry and flung out his arm in another direction, toward the middle of the stream.

Through a broken place in the ice not twenty paces away, two claw-like hands were reaching up; as the trio gazed, a head followed, covered with carrot-yellow hair which hung in dripping points about two starting eyes set in a ghastly blue-

white face. Finally a white-cloaked body raised itself over the edge of the ice and stood before them.

Whether it would retreat or advance none waited to see. With a yell of "Hallad!" Gard was off up the river at a deer's pace, the others at his heels. When he came to another place where the bank was flat, he turned his long toes up it and plunged into the forest, the others still following.

Guiding six-foot runners in and out between trees, however, is less easy; and before long they were forced to moderate their speed. As soon as they did that, Alrek's wonted coolness was able to overtake him. He stopped disgustedly.

"We are simpletons to run. Hallad would do us no harm."

Gard devoted the only breath he had to triumph: "You do not claim that it is Tunni, now!"

"It is Hallad," the Red One agreed in a gasp. "If we could cut off his head and put it between his feet, that would make him rest quiet."

The Ugly One shook his black mane. "You forget that a wave-covered man can not be dug up again. It is said to be a sign that they have been

received well when drowned men come back after their death; yet Hallad has scarcely the look of one who has been well entertained——"

"He was always wanting something different from what he had," Brand sniffed.

"However that is, it is unlikely that he has come back to make trouble," Alrek said. "That is only done by men who were unruly before their death. Hallad had less spirit than a wood-goat when he was alive. I think we were fools to run."

"If you had been that kind of a fool on the Cape of the Crosses, you would have made more by it," Gard muttered in rare resentfulness,—though he was not rash enough to speak so that his chief could hear him.

The Sword-Bearer on his side knew better than to ask over. Instead he said: "This is the first time I have been in this part of the country. I wonder what kind of game they have here," and moved leisurely away where a treeless space left a white page crossed and recrossed with woodland runes.

Preferring to discuss their last adventure before they sought a new one, the other two sat down to

wait for him. But they were hardly settled before his whistled call brought them again to their feet.

They found him kneeling beside a trench-like trail, testing with his bared hands the condition of the snow that had fallen back into it.

"If this were a five days' journey north, I should declare them elk tracks," he said. "Snorri of Iceland shot many a one of them up there, last winter, which he thought greatly superior to any we have in Norway. I would give my head for another elk hunt." He remained gazing at the trail in pleased retrospection, which moved the two Greenlanders to say enviously that they had never seen an elk.

"You will find it sport when you do," the Sword-Bearer assured them. Then he came out of his musing and arose, once more Alrek the Chief, brief and purposeful. "They can scarcely be less than deer's, however; and they were made this morning. It is easier to find tracks than to find what made them, as it is one thing to sight land across drift-ice and another to land on it; but we shall have poor luck if we can not get our meat out of this."

Instinctively they fell again under his leadership, straightening as he rose and turning their runners in the direction he was facing.

"Certainly the snow could not be in better condition," Brand gave tacit assent, and reassured himself of the safety of the quiver at his back.

"I knew that we should have luck to-day, because I heard a wolf howl last night," Gard added, with a hitch to his belt.

Then they glided away, single file, under the white arches spanning the white aisles.

CHAPTER X

THROUGH WHICH THE CHAMPIONS CHASE VINLAND ELK

THROUGH the forest and out like flitting shadows, pausing only to make sure that the trail they were following was fresher than any of those which crossed it. Over a pond and across a bog and zigzag up a hill,—they had not grazed a stone or snapped a twig; it seemed that every stride must bring them in sight of the game. Then, on the other side of the slope, Alrek blundered. Descending at lightning speed, he turned his head to look behind, and in so doing unconsciously straightened his body ever so little from the required bend. In a breath he was seated on the snow while his skees finished the coast without him, at the bottom dashing noisily against a stone. Instantly, from somewhere in the white distance, came like an echo the sound of crashing timber, a sound which passed so quickly that if only

one had heard it he might have doubted his ears.

All three had heard it, however; and the two who reached the bottom still shod looked scathingly upon the third as he came plunging down, breaking through the crust to his knees wherever it covered a hollow.

"I advise you to tie yourself on," one of them jeered; and the other one gibed: "Would you like to hold to my cloak in going down the next hill?"

If he would, the Sword-Bearer did not admit it; but it was something that he was reduced to silence. They swung after him in high feather when he was once more on his runners and off across the valley.

Beyond the next rise there was a plain, fringed by a thicket; and there in the packed and trampled snow and the gnawed branches and peeled bark they found yet more tangible proof of what they had lost.

"We should have got a herd if nobody had spoiled it," Gard grunted.

Before Brand also could voice his reproach,

Alrek—darting here and there among the trees in search of the new trail—uttered his low whistle and was off like a hare. Like hounds after hare they were after him, and Vinland trees looked their first upon real skee-running.

Speed, not silence, was the object now. More than once their iron-shod staffs rang sharply against the rocks as they thrust out the poles to change their course, rudder-like. Finding coasting too slow now, they took the last half of each hill at a leap. And when a plain stretched its smooth surface before them, or a frozen pond or a marsh, their speed was the speed of a deer at his best.

And now the hunted were far from their best. The holes which their sharp hoofs had at first cut so cleanly through the crust were becoming haggled. Farther on, the trail itself that had been so straight began to show the wavering of the panic-stricken. At last the hunters came to a place where a wisp of bloody foam stained the white. Only a rigid economy of breath kept back a cheer, and they put the energy saved into fresh speed.

A jump over a pile of boulders, a spurt over a low knoll, and there in the open space beyond

was the prey, six panting froth-flecked creatures, stricken staring with terror.

"But what in the Troll's name are they?" cried Gard and Brand together, at sight of the huge, shaggy, ungainly bodies with antlers like shovels and enormous noses like nothing they had ever seen in their lives.

At the same instant Alrek answered them with the glad cry: "Vinland elk!"

The next instant he had added a command to halt, checking his own advance by a thrust of his skee-staff into the snow, and following that act by casting it aside and swiftly unslinging his bow: "Be on your guard! They have not deer's tempers."

Even as he spoke, the bull in the lead flung up his mighty antlered head and, while the other five moved on, wheeled and faced the foe, like a chief covering his people's retreat.

Alrek paid him the tribute of an admiring murmur, but the withdrawal of the five set the Greenlanders wild with exasperation.

"Charge him!" "Finish him!" "Get him out of the way!" they cried savagely, and started

forward even before their arrows were on their bow-strings.

The only thing they knew clearly after that was that the Vinland elk did not wait to be charged. Gard, who was a length ahead, had suddenly a glimpse of eyes like balls of green fire; something which had looked as fixed as a boulder became, lightning-quick, a hurtling mass descending on him, and he had a vision of terrible sharp-edged forefeet that could mangle a man to jelly.

Dropping his weapons, he turned to run, but lapped his skees and fell headlong. Falling, he uttered a hoarse cry as he saw Brand's hastily aimed arrow bury itself harmlessly in the animal's flank. Then, as he rolled backward, he caught sight of Alrek and regained hope.

Only the Sword-Bearer's brown cheeks, flaming crimson, showed his excitement; the rock beside him was no steadier than the arm that held his bow. Drawing back the string with all his strength, he sent an arrow through the shaggy neck where it joins the body; and the great beast fell forward on his knees and died without a quiver.

As the animal sank, Gard arose, breathing curses on his own awkwardness while he snatched up his scattered weapons, his eyes fixed greedily on the five disappearing over a ridge. And Brand cried fiercely: "There is as much ahead, and more besides!" and leaped forward. And Alrek plucked forth another arrow and drew himself up to spring over the dead forester lying high before him—drew himself up and then paused and hesitated, gazing down at the mighty shape. As nobly warrior-like as he had made his desperate charge, so nobly warrior-like he lay in his death, a leader who had given his life to save his people.

Slowly the young Viking stretched forth his hand. "Stop!" he ordered.

Poised in mid-air, as it were, they looked over their shoulders at him, crying impatiently: "What is the matter?"

This time the Chief of the Champions gave his gesture authority. "Come back. To kill them also would be a low-minded act. He took his death-wound to save them. We have all we need. Come back."

An instant they balanced there, gazing at the

white ridge over which the last dark form was disappearing. Then the obedience bred in the bones of Gard the Thrall-Born turned him back to his master.

"You are the chief," he muttered.

At the same time Brand the Red made up his mind. "Though you should spend all your breath, you would not hinder me from going!" he cried, and sprang forward.

The arrow which Alrek had drawn forth was still in his hand; in the grasp of his other hand was his bow. Fitting the shaft on the string, he spoke his warning:

"It is unlikely that you will do any hunting for some time if you do not come back."

As a flame to a dry leaf, so was a threat to Brand's temper. Hissing defiance, it flared up, and he redoubled his speed.

Above the creak of his skees he heard at the same instant two sounds,—Gard's voice crying: "Would you kill him?" and the twang of Alrek's bow-string. Then his right arm dropped at his side with an arrow through it. His chief had foretold truly that he would do no more hunting for some

time. It was as much in rage as pain that he caught at the shaft, cursing.

Gard's relief took the form of boisterous laughter; but the Sword-Bearer, as soon as he could make himself heard, spoke gravely:

"If you think you paid too much for your big words, you have only your own foolishness to thank for making the bargain."

Coming slowly back to them, still holding his arm, Brand's face was as white as it had been that day on shipboard; but there was no less of a swagger in his bearing. "Who says I paid too much?" he panted. "I shall say what I choose though you shoot into me every arrow of your quiver. *I* find no fault with the bargain!"

Alrek's gravity yielded to one of his short sudden laughs. "Now if you are satisfied, it is certain that I am," he said, and studied the Red One with twinkling eyes. Amusement was still alight in them when he stepped forward and held out his hand, yet there was also in his manner a new cordiality. "It has never happened to me before to meet a sprout to equal you," he declared. "I foretell that I shall certainly kill you some time,

but I promise that I will carve runes about you afterward."

"How do you know that it will be you who does the rune-carving?" Brand retorted; but at the same time he yielded his palm with flattered willingness. A little later he even yielded his wounded arm that the hand which put the shaft in might cut it out again.

Twilight never gathered in upon a more contented party than these three weary hunters, sprawled luxuriously on the fragrant heaps of evergreen boughs around the leaping fire, fed to repletion on the daintiest food they knew, pouring their hearts out in discussion of the day's adventures. They fell asleep wrangling over the placing of the antlers on the booth wall.

CHAPTER XI

TELLING HOW TRADE WITH THE SKRAELLINGS CAME TO A MYSTERIOUS END

THE antlers were finally hung over the high-seat, while the hide made a blanket for the bunk below, and the effect was so imposing that every Champion went fur-mad as soon as he saw them. For a month afterward, it took all the chief's authority to keep the fuel pile supplied and cooks at their post. Every lad not told off—and told sternly off—for public service or private drudgery, spent his days in ranging the country in search of spoil, and his nights in dreaming of hunts wherein each dead tree should turn out to be the den of a hibernating bear which he would slay with valorous ease and bring home to deck the high-seat, even as Leif the Lucky had done before him.

The way in which they did finally come into possession of a bearskin, however, was really more dream-like than their dream.

Nothing could have been more peaceful than the beginning of the happening, in the women's room of Karlsefne's booth. Loafing after the noonday meal, Erlend the Amiable had stretched his plump length over the cushions of a bench. At one end of the fire, the long-kirtled forms of Gudrid and her women moved to and fro before their looms. At the other, where the firelight lay brightest, the Sword-Bearer was playing wolf with the baby,—a game evoking so much rumbling growling and squealing laughter that presently it took precedence of the conversation.

"You are spoiling him, Kinsman Alrek," Gudrid said, looking around the edge of her loom with a smile which belied her reproach.

The prettiest of the bondmaids gave her braids a pettish flirt. "That is so," she confirmed. "Yesterday, when it happened that I was at the door trying to talk to Hauk Votsson, I was obliged to turn around and growl between every two words or the child would have deafened us. I do not know what Hauk thought of me."

"If you wish, I will ask him," Erlend

offered,—a piece of flippancy which cost him his comfort, as to save his ears he was obliged to take to instant flight around the looms.

But Alrek, sitting back on his heels, shaking back his long hair, remained intent upon the cradle. "It is the greatest fun," he said, "to see the cub try to frown at me. His eyebrows are like the fuzz on a chicken, yet he tries to make them look like his namesake's, before a laugh gets the better of him. Watch now!"

Small Snorri had been there but seven months; he was still wonderfully new. The maid and Erlend left their chase, and Gudrid came from her loom, and together they watched breathlessly the knitting of the downy brows above the blue eyes, and the slow dawning of the unwilling smile, brighter and brighter, until in each soft cheek a dimple broke.

"He is going to be in every respect like his father!" Gudrid cried, falling on her knees beside him. And she was smothering him with kisses, and the others were looking on sympathetically, when the door was flung open before little Olaf the Fair, rosy and breathless.

"Where is Alrek?" he panted. "I want—Oh! Alrek! What do you think I have seen?"

"Hallad?" shrieked the three bondmaids together.

"Skraellings! Black as crowberries. Crossing the open space west of here. With big packs on their backs. I was up in that tree by the wheat-shed, watching for Brand to slip on the slide I had made to get revenge on him for cuffing me, and—" His voice was lost in the babel of exclamations that came from the bondmaids and from the men peering around the hall door.

Gudrid rose from beside the cradle with a gesture of authority. "Too much noise is here. Since Karlsefne is away it behooves us to be especially careful how we behave. Run, some one of you, to the Icelanders' booth. I know that Snorri is not there, but if it happen that Biorn is, ask him to get a following together and stand ready to receive the wild men. And since it is likely that they will want to buy the same dairy wares as before, Melkorka, you may have charge—but there! Tch! Your heedlessness is such that you would give them three times as much as they required. I shall have

to portion it out myself. The child I will leave with you, Roswitha—No, you would forget him if a man so much as looked through the door at you! Kinsman!" She laid a white hand on Alrek's brown one as he would have moved past her. "He is more fond of you than of any one, and I would trust you before a hundred girls,—so long as you keep his fingers away from that hatchet in your belt. Will you not stay with him the little while that I must be in the dairy?"

Stay with a baby while the long-looked-forward-to trading went on without him! Frowning involuntarily, the Sword-Bearer hesitated,—and during that pause the Fate who was spinning his life-thread sat with suspended breath, so much hung on his answer.

It can not be denied that it came somewhat grudgingly when it did come. "Why—if it *will* be a *little* while, kinswoman," he stipulated, turning back.

Gudrid waited to hear no more; with the last word she was off, sweeping the maids like chaff before her. Erlend and Olaf had long since vanished; and now the men could be heard clattering

out of the great next room that was their headquarters.

From the green behind the booths came the clamor of barking dogs and the thud of running feet accompanied by excited voices, now far away, now just outside the door. Gradually the scattered chatter blended into a hum; the hum rose higher and higher; then fell suddenly in a hush so deep that it seemed to the Sword-Bearer he could hear the pat of bare feet and the rustle of boughs put aside; and his fancy conjured up a picture of dark forms with bright-eyed shaggy heads bent under shaggier packs, emerging single file from the white depths of the forest. Directly after, the sound of strange guttural voices speaking words he had never heard told him that some part of his vision was correct.

"Oh, you great hindrance!" he sighed to the tyrant in the cradle.

But as even while he complained, he obeyed the command of the chubby fists by picking up the soft little body as gently as a woman would have done, and tossing and dandling it in his strong brown hands as no woman could have done, the

tyrant was in no way cast down but clung to him confidingly, catching his breath with squeals of delight and winding up by burying both fists in the brown mane with a rapture of gurgling laughter.

So Gudrid found them when she came in, the color of haste in her fair face; and her smile was very lovely as she took her baby from his guard.

"Whether you are like your father or not, Alrek my kinsman, you have a good disposition," she said; then went on swiftly: "I hurried because I want to remind you of something. I beg of you, do not forget that Karlsefne has forbidden any weapon whatever to be traded to the hatchet-men, no matter what loose property they offer for it. Do not forget, or let your men forget."

Alrek's glance reassured her. "I will remember," he said quietly.

"Then go quickly! They have only just opened their packs." She gave him a little shove, but she might have saved herself the trouble for he was out of the door at a bound.

Coming out into the gathering was like coming upon some strange new-world fair. Everywhere

over the white of the snow-covered earth, against the gray of the snow-filled sky, the Northmen's gay cloaks made rings of bright color around the dark fur-clad forms of the wild men. Everywhere the sounds of fair-time had vanquished the stillness of the forest,—the hails of eager barterers, the boasts of jubilant purchasers, even the familiar din of fighting dogs wherever a Norse hound and one of Skraelling breed were able to find a spot free from interfering boot-toes.

On the step before the dairy door, the yellow heads of the three pretty bondmaids showed above a hedge of bristling black locks; the love of trading, so long denied, getting the better of any fear they might have felt of their uncouth customers. As Alrek looked, Roswitha with one hand delivered a cheese ball into a copper-colored palm and with the other drew in a magnificent wolf-skin; while Melkorka, her saucy Irish face twinkling with mischief, ladled curds from her bowl into the gaping mouth of an enormous Skraelling, standing before her with half-shut eyes and an air of solemn content.

"If only we could build cows as well as ships

She ladled curds from her bowl into the gaping mouth.

out of timber!" the Sword-Bearer wished as he watched them with a grin.

He was brought out of his reverie by the appearance of a shadow on the snow at his feet. Though he had not heard the faintest sound of an approach, he looked up to find a wild man as dark as the shadow and almost as tall standing at his side. Over the Skraelling's left shoulder and arm was hung a bearskin which took the Viking's breath to look at; his right arm he was stretching toward Alrek's sword, a glitter of indescribable craftiness in his beady eyes. It was so like the stories that the Irish monks told of the wiles of the Evil One that Alrek's recoil had in it even a touch of superstitious fear.

"No," he said severely. "No!" And without further parley, he turned and hastened in the direction in which Brand's red locks glowed between the gray of cap and cloak, like fire amid ashes.

"I want to know at once that you have remembered not to trade them any weapons," he demanded with an urgent hand on the Red One's arm.

Once Brand would have shaken off that hand

resentfully; now he looked around with affectionate impudence. "Which are you the more anxious to know,—that I have remembered or that I have not traded?" he parried.

The Sword-Bearer let his hand fall with a breath of relief. "Since you can make light of the matter, I know that no harm has been done; if you had been disobedient, you would have hurled the news at me like a spear. I trust you to keep on remembering it."

Brand made him a salute of mock deference. "I will heed your orders in this as in everything," he mouthed the formal phrase of submission.

"Now I hope you will do better than that," his chief returned; then hailed the Hare, scudding past, and bade him summon every member of the band to immediate council.

When at last they were all before him, and he had obtained from them individually an assurance that the order was still unbroken, he delivered the command over again with all the weight he could bring to bear.

They received the reminder as insult added to injury.

"I do not think I stand in need of telling when already for my poorest spear I have refused three wolfskins!" the Bull cried, wagging his yellow head; while Ketil the Glib mocked openly:

"Behold the caution! Lose no time in punishing Erlend who has traded them a brooch with a pin as long as my finger."

Even small Olaf sniffed rebelliously. "If I had known *that* was all you were going to say, I doubt if I would have come. I thought you were going to offer us your red cloak to trade with."

"My red cloak?" Alrek repeated.

Forty eyes fastened themselves wistfully on the garment, while at least ten voices answered: "Of course it is not to be expected—" "Yet you could buy the most costly furnishings—" "They would like it better than curds even—" "Njal got the finest gray fur only for a kerchief with one stripe of red." "Think if this were cut in strips!" "Another cloak would keep you equally warm—" "Karlsefne would give you a king's mantle for the asking——"

Shaking his head, Alrek folded the stained drapery to him with both arms. "You show too

much generosity! I can tell you that you would not get this though it would buy all the fur in Vinland. My father gave it to me at the time of my first Viking voyage; while one thread holds to another, I shall wear it." Then he unfolded his arms with a gesture more encouraging. "But it may be that we shall not fare so ill, for I have hit upon another plan. I have a suit of feasting-clothes of red velvet——"

Not one of the twenty waited to hear more; after the Hare the band was off like the tail after a comet. The Sword-Bearer considered himself lucky that he reached the booth in time to secure one sleeve for his own ventures.

After that the trading was like trading in a dream. Even after the first recklessness had passed and they had cut the velvet into strips no wider than their thumbs, the same sizes of skins were given in exchange. Erlend, the first to run out of purchase money, was made custodian of the spoils; and the rapidity with which the pile grew behind him in what remained of the short afternoon was enough to heat cooler blood. By the falling of twilight, Alrek announced the whimsical determination to

try if he could not capture the bearskin itself with what remained of his red sleeve and the foot of a red stocking which he had found.

Because of the failing light, quenched early by a gentle fall of snow, the trading had ceased before he started. Here and there, where light streamed out through open doors, the forest men stooped in groups, packing for departure all wares not previously bound around their heads or bestowed in their stomachs. From group to group he went without finding the tall Skraelling, until suddenly he caught a glimpse of him passing the last door in the line, the door of their own booth. It looked as though the great skin was still draping his shoulders, so Alrek started leisurely toward him and reached the wheat shed this side of the Champions' booth. Then he slipped on Olaf's slide and fell, striking his head against a great oak root.

That was the last thing he remembered,—and he did not remember that for some time. The next thing he was conscious of was sitting in his high-seat in the booth, in silence and alone. The flickering firelight that showed him the stretch of empty

benches revealed gradually to his bewildered eyes a dark huddled shape on the white surface of the table in front of him. What it was or how it got there, he knew no more than what he was doing there himself. He wondered dully if the Huntsman could have put a spell upon him, until—like a wind-breath through a fog—came the recollection that a sailor had once told him of having had a similar experience, and that it had been caused by striking his head in falling through a hatchway on the ship. Moving his head, the Sword-Bearer found it as sore as an unhealed wound, and that part of his problem was solved. But where had he been, and why was the booth empty at this time of day? It was a relief to have the door open upon Gard's hulking long-armed figure, powdered with glistening snow.

When the Ugly One had taken three steps beyond the threshold, he saw the chief in the high-seat and stopped with a loud exclamation.

Alrek grinned faintly. "Your surprise is no greater than mine. I should be thankful if you would tell me how I got here. No," as Gard made a gesture of unbelief, "I declare myself in earnest.

I suppose I fell and struck my head somewhere. Do you know where I have been? And why the booth is empty?"

When he had come around the fire and looked curiously at the Sword-Bearer, Gard's doubts were laid. "The proof of this is that the left side of your face is scratched and dirty," he said. "It is likely that you fell on Olaf's slide. You were going in that direction, the last I saw of you. I forgot you after the screech."

"What screech?"

"The yell that started the Skraellings, of course."

"What Skraellings?"

"*What* Skraellings!" Gard echoed; but Alrek's memory had stirred.

"I remember! They were here trading. I came out of the women's house and saw them—" He got upon his feet. "Are they gone?"

Gard began to laugh. "You *are* addled! I should have thought the racket sufficient to wake Thorwald in his grave. It is certain that they are gone! At the first note of the yell they dropped their packs and plunged into the woods, howling

like trolls. What frightened them this time, no one knows. Erlend and Brand followed, and also some of the other men of the band, but the creatures seemed to melt and vanish. The men are only just coming back. That is why no one is here yet to get the meal."

Coming down to the fire, Alrek kicked the logs about, partly to mend the burning, partly to vent his irritation. "Never have I heard of a fall so foolishly timed. I could give my head another knock— What is this? Fur?" He stretched his hand toward the table. "A bearskin? What a— *the bearskin the Skraelling offered for my sword?*" Memory came back like a rush of fire, lighting the dark corners of his mind, flaming from his eyes as he turned upon the slouching figure. "How did it come here?"

Gard began to speak with unwonted swiftness: "It is true, I forgot to tell you that I bought it myself. You must recollect that things were not so dear at the end of the trading. I gave only a piece of your tunic and—and my ring with the red stone. I would not have parted with that ring for anything less. He liked very much to get it,

and put it on his finger as soon— " He broke off as Alrek's hands fell upon his shoulders, forcing him down on his knees where the fire could light his face. For the moment they were neither comrade and comrade, nor chief and follower, but master and thrall.

The Sword-Bearer's low voice seemed a hiss between his teeth. " Swear to me that you gave no weapon for it! Take oath on the cross of my sword hilt! "

Gard reached out even eagerly. " I take oath on the cross, so help me Frey and Njord and Odin! "

After a while Alrek's hands relaxed their grasp. It was some time before his eyes loosened their hold, but at last they also released the Ugly One and fell away, back to the fur. " It is good that you are able to swear to it," he said grimly.

Brushing from his knee the ashes into which he had been forced, the Ugly One grunted. " Do you think I am a fool like Brand? Even if I did not care for your orders, would I not be apt to heed Karlsefne's? "

" It is a good thing that you do," the chief said again.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH THE CHAMPIONS FEEL THEIR IMPORTANCE

SMILING, Gudrid drew out the head she had thrust through the booth door at Erlend's urgent invitation. "It is as splendid as can be in every way. I do not wonder that you want to give a feast to display it."

A little consciousness was in Erlend's laugh as he shut the door and walked beside her through the grove. "It is not altogether to display it," he protested. "In a few weeks the spring games will be held; it is the custom of every one to give a feast at that season. I tell you we are going to show some great feats. We exercise ourselves every afternoon. They are practising now in an open place which the chief found in the woods. That is where I am going."

Pausing, Gudrid drew higher on her hip her accustomed burden, a bundle wrapped in white

rabbit-skins from which looked forth a little rosy face. "Is Alrek there?" she asked. "Then I think I will try my luck in that direction, if so be they will allow a woman to come near?"

"I think they will not mind your coming if you go right away again," Erlend concluded after some consideration.

Apparently she felt equal to the risk, for she entered with him the broad trough-like path trodden through the snow of the grove. "I go only for a walk," she said. "We have been too much shut in the house, the child and I, since that frightful trading day."

It seemed to the Amiable One that she shivered as she spoke, so he observed politely: "It is a bad thing that you were made sick by it. Melkorka says that you even saw a ghost."

"Melkorka blunders much in her speaking and blundered twice as much in her hearing," Gudrid answered. "I said only that I got so full of fear that I expected to see ghosts. Sitting alone in the house with the child, it came into my head what might happen if the Skraellings should turn an evil side, with Karlsefne away and that good-

natured Biorn not expecting evil. And the more I thought, the stranger the noises outside seemed to me and the stranger shapes the shadows took, until once I was so sure that one was a Skraelling stealing in upon me that I bent over and covered the cradle with my body,—and just then came that cry!" She pressed her hand to her ear at the recollection.

Erlend smiled indulgently. "Now did you think it so terrible? It is likely that one of them looked into the cattle-shed and saw the bull——"

The glance her blue eyes sent over her shoulder silenced him even before her words. "It would be a strange wonder if you could tell me news about it! Was I not here at the time the bull frightened them? I heard how they screamed then, and it was as different from this screech as day from night. In this cry there were death-sounds and no life-sounds. My foster-mother, Halldis, was knowing in weird matters. I know of what I speak, though all men think otherwise. And I know enough to wish to forget the mishap. Let us not talk of it any more. I wish to enjoy this fine weather."

FEEL THEIR IMPORTANCE

It was a day to be enjoyed. Beyond the network of brown branches the sky was dazzling blue, with here and there a fleecy cloud. Dazzling white, snow lay in the curves of the boughs and filled the hollows of the ground; though on the ridges where the bright sun touched, the brown earth showed through. Everywhere, the wind was moistly, sweetly fresh.

"I do not wonder that it makes you kick up your heels like young horses," Gudrid laughed, when she came at last to the level treeless space in whose middle six Champions leaped and wrestled, while ten more lounged at one side, applauding or hissing the wrestlers as their critical judgment decided.

At sight of Erlend, the ten waved their hands in careless greeting; at sight of the kirtled figure of Gudrid, they sat up in unmistakable disapproval; and a long lean wrestler with a mane of red hair stamped petulantly when he was obliged to retire from the field to the bordering trees where his tunic and cloak awaited him.

"Though no more than seven women are in Vinland, a man can not get away from them

though he go into the heart of a wood," he sputtered.

"Hush! She will hear you," muttered Gard, who stood beside him; whereupon the Red One's voice rose in exasperation:

"I do not care whether she hears me or not! Will you keep to what concerns you? I have told you before this that I am able to pay the price of my deeds."

From under the tunic he was about to pull down over his head, Gard looked at him irefully. "And I have told you," he retorted, "that one can not always tell what the price of his deed will be."

"I do not care *what* it is!" bellowed Brand.

Harald Grettirsson turned on them with a grin. "What ails you two that you have done nothing but quarrel since the trading day? Cool off a little," he jeered, and suddenly ran into them so that they were jostled off the high ground into a hollow and sank in snow up to their waists. Foreseeing vengeance, Grettirsson took promptly to his heels, and the desertion of the three completed the interruption begun by the appearance of Gudrid's blue hood.

Gudrid took her departure with tactful promptness. "Now you need not trouble yourself to hunt for fine words," she forestalled the somewhat embarrassed greeting of her young kinsman. "I am well versed in the Viking laws about keeping women out; we have no other intention than to go directly back, the Frowner and I."

Cordial as his relations with his kinswoman were, the chief could not ask her to alter her decision; but he reached out and took the bundle off her hip. "The Frowner is not a woman," he corrected. "I think he will like the noise better than the rattling of his string of shark's teeth. I will see to it that he comes to no harm."

The mother yielded him doubtfully. "But do you know for certain that you will?" she demurred. "If he should get his hand on the hatchet in your belt——"

"Why, he would be able to do more than I can," Alrek finished for her. "I have been unable to find my hatchet for weeks."

Gudrid consented to smile. "I took for granted it was there. Then I will certainly leave him, for I should like him to be outdoors some while

longer. I will send a thrall—a man-thrall—to fetch him."

But it came about that small Snorri Thorfinnsson was returned to his mother by no such humble individual. With the shortening of the light and the lengthening of the shadows, Karlsefne the Lawman came through the wood on his way campward from a day's outing. Coming out in the open where a dozen Champions were fencing with a mighty clash and clatter, he would have apologized for the intrusion and kept on his way; but reaching the tree before which the red-cloaked chief sprawled on a great rug, drawling comment, he heard from the rabbit-skin bundle at the chief's side a squeal of laughter which brought him to a standstill.

"What have we here?" he asked in surprise.

Rising to greet him, Alrek looked down at the bundle with a laugh. "It is likely that your son is going to make a Berserker, Karlsefne," he answered. "The more noise the swords make, the louder he laughs."

The smile dawning on the Lawman's lips faded as his glance passed from the rabbit-skin bundle

to the rug on which it lay. After a little he said gravely: "This is an unusually fine bearskin which you have, my young kinsman. I want to ask if it is the one the Skraellings brought, on that last trading day of which so much has been told?"

It was so plain that the same misgiving was in his mind which had first risen to Alrek's, that the Sword-Bearer breathed a prayer of thankfulness that he had lost no time in making sure of Gard's good faith. He replied readily: "It is the same one, Karlsefne. One of my men had such luck in trading that he bought it when the price was lower than it had been."

"Nevertheless, I should like much to know what he paid for it," said the Lawman.

"Willingly," answered Alrek the Chief. "He paid a large piece of the red cloth which we had been trading with, and a ring with a red stone. The Skraelling liked the ring so well that he put it on as soon as he bought it."

The Lawman's gaze became less unswervingly direct; presently its sharpness was softened by a twinkle. "Now if all the Northmen of the new lands continue to show such merchant talent, Vin-

land will soon be as great a trading place as Iceland," he laughed.

Then, as if to remove any lingering doubt of his friendliness, he added that their taste in selecting a practising place was excellent; and that it appeared that they were doing good work in it; and that, if they would allow it, he should be glad to remain a while and look on. When permission had been graciously accorded, he sat down on the rug between the chief and the rabbit-skin bundle and showed himself the most inspiring audience the band had ever performed before.

Under the stimulus of his applause, Njal the Jumper achieved a mark a finger's length higher than any he had made before; while Brand the Wrestler felt such power swell in his great limbs that for a time he seriously considered the idea of challenging Karlsefne himself. Later, he was glad that he had not, for when they stopped to rest and came and stood around the bearskin, Karlsefne borrowed Alrek's dwarf-made sword and rose up, towering and sinewy and straight as a pine, and showed them some feats that he had learned in the East,—the real East where the sun is so hot

that all people are as brown as roasted fowls, and the rich eat snow for a luxury. Baring a knotted arm as lean as a spear-shaft, he did things that furnished them fireside gossip for the rest of the cold weather.

When at last he had set the Frowner on his shoulder, and he and the Champions had parted in a glow of good-fellowship, Erlend said warmly:

"Biorn Gudbrandsson is an open-handed chief, and Snorri of Iceland is shrewder than most men; but the one surpassing others in high-mindedness and knowing everything is Thorfinn Karlsefne. I think it an honor to our feast that he has consented to come to it."

CHAPTER XIII

GIVING THE REASON WHY THE SKRAELLINGS FLED

It happened, however, that Thorfinn Karlsefne did not get back from his spring exploring trip in time for the games. Inspecting all the self-sown wheat-fields and natural vineyards in the vicinity, he had been gone a week; and the light of the momentous day had faded into twilight and the dusk in its turn had melted into moonlight, silvering the forest like a frost, before he came through it with his men.

Meeting a ray of light from the last booth in the line and catching from the same source a faint note of revelry, he spoke smilingly to his partner, Snorri of Iceland: "I recollect now that we have missed great happenings. It is likely that if the light were good enough we should find heads and limbs strewed like pebbles over the plain."

"What witches' stuff this moonlight is!" Snorri laughed in return. "As you spoke, it al-

most seemed to me as if I saw an arm down there." He nodded his head toward the ravine along whose brink they were walking; and old Grimkel, behind him, followed the motion with his one eye and grunted:

"I see what you mean,—yonder where the moon strikes. It has the look of an arm."

Still moving forward, Karlsefne also glanced down into the black pool of shadow. From the dark slope, something like a snag stood out so that the moonlight caught it and gave it a weird resemblance to a human hand with fingers wide-spread in the air. Looking down at it, he came slowly to a standstill. Presently, while the chat behind him ceased in surprise, he grasped a wiry bush on the brink and let himself over the edge until he could touch with his staff the dark mass from which the snag stood out. Using the staff like a pitchfork, he flung off the layers of sodden pine branches heaped there and bent to look again. Then he saw that the reason it looked like an arm was because an arm was what it was, lean and brown, outflung from a stark body lying face downward in the brush.

Those waiting above heard his voice rise awfully from the shadow: "It is a Skraelling who has been murdered! Fetch torches!"

Waiting for the lights to be brought, the men stood looking dumbly at one another and at the snag-like arm, in every mind the same thought. Once Karlsefne's deep tones interpreted their silence, tolling heavily through the darkness:

"I do not know who has done this deed, but I know that in slaying this one man he has taken the lives of more men than tongue can number. If ever the Skraellings come again it will be to make warfare, and to save our lives we shall be forced to take more of theirs; and so it will go on through ages yet unborn, until a white face—which I had striven to make a sign of friendliness—will become to the wild men a token of bloodshed." A moment his voice rang out in terrible wrath: "Behold how the heedlessness of one man can overthrow the wisdom of a hundred!"

Daring no answer, they awaited in silence the arrival of the torches. But when at last the lights had been brought and handed down, and they

had descended after them, at least four spoke at once:

"It is the Skraelling who offered the bear's hide!"

"By Odin," cried a fifth, "I saw him walking in this direction shortly before the time of the scream! He must have fallen over the bank and lain all this while under the snow that was coming down."

"What has become of the hide, however?" pondered Hjalmar Thick-Skull, before memory recalled to him whose booth the great skin was even now gracing as its chiefest treasure.

"It must be that they bought it just before he was slain," Grimkel struck in hastily.

But the Lawman took the torch from him and held it to each brown hand in turn. "No ring with a red stone is on any of the fingers," he said.

Immediately after, Hjalmar, holding the other torch, uttered an exclamation: "Here is what slew him!" and they all crowded forward to look,—and looking, stood dumfounded.

The Thick-Skulled said wonderingly: "Now I

have several times heard it said that men believe Brand the Red gave the Skraelling a weapon for the skin, but no man guessed that a weapon had been given in this way."

CHAPTER XIV

SHOWING HOW DISGRACE CAME UPON ALREK THE CHIEF

It was as though all the troubles of Vinland were gathered around that dark heap in the ravine, and all the pleasures were gathered around the Champions' hospitable fire. Built of juniper fagots whose sweetness blended with the fragrance of the pine branches carpeting the floor, it filled the air with the spicy aroma of Yule-tide; and Yule-tide cheer was on the long tables on either side the hearth, and Yule-tide mirth was on the faces above the board. Every leap of the flames revealed some new treasure of claw or hide or antler; and at each admiring tribute from their guests the Champions' hearts swelled with pride, so that they were obliged to relieve the pressure by echoing at the top of their lungs the song Rane was singing to chords from a home-made harp. The only flaw in their content was that Karlsefne was

not there to see their glory. When an uproar among the dogs outside announced the arrival of a guest, they left everything to fix eager eyes on the opening door.

The form that strode in out of the moonlight was Karlsefne's, followed by Snorri of Iceland, but the breath they had thought to spend in cheers went out in gasps as the dancing firelight showed his face. Stopping just within the threshold, he stood gripping his silver-shod staff in both hands before him, like a bar in the way of his wrath.

From the high-seat, the young chief saluted him with troubled mien: "We bid you welcome, Karlsefne, and take it as an honor that you have come. I hope your journey has been according to your pleasure, and that nothing has happened which you dislike?" He made a sign that Erlend, in his feasting clothes of blue-and-silver, should act as master of ceremonies and conduct the distinguished guest to the seat prepared for him.

The Lawman did not appear to heed the invitation. "I give you thanks for your greeting," he said, "but I will not conceal it from you that something has happened. Before this feast goes any

further, I want to put some questions to your men."

From some instinctive foreboding, Alrek glanced hastily across at Gard. Finding the Ugly One's dark face as lowering as a storm cloud, while Brand's beside him was aflash with excitement, the trouble in the young chief's eyes deepened. Yet he answered steadily: "You are overchief in Vinland, Karlsefne, and must have your way about everything. Yet will you not first take the seat of honor——"

"I will accept no hospitality here until this matter is cleared," the Lawman grimly cut him short; then turned upon the Ugly One. "I want to ask Gard Eldirsson what he paid the Skraelling for the skin yonder on the high-seat?"

As he had given it each time before, Gard muttered his answer, without looking up: "I gave him a piece of red cloth and a ring with a red stone in it. He liked so well to get the ring that he put it on his finger as soon as he got it."

Crack! the staff Karlsefne was gripping broke under the strain; it seemed that his voice also must break from his control. "It was not seen that he

wore it to-day," he was beginning; when Brand arose, pushing back his goblet and bowl with a loud clatter.

"If what you mean is that you have met that Skraelling and seen a knife in his belt instead of a ring on his hand," he said, "I will spare you the trouble of asking further by declaring that I traded it to him myself. Gard lies when he says that he bought the skin. It happened that from behind a tree he saw me give the weapon; and because he expected that Alrek would slay me for daring it, he sought to save trouble by making up the ring-story before I got a good chance to tell what I had done. I gave him no thanks for it, as I do not lack the boldness to stand behind any deed I do. I held my tongue only because I could not speak without bringing him into trouble. Now I will hold it no longer, and you may do what you like when my chief is through with me." He flashed his leader his glance of affectionate insolence, and grinned at the look he got in return. But before Alrek could answer, Karlsefne spoke:

"You would have me believe that your chief does not know of this matter?"

The Red One tossed his long locks with a flourish which suggested that he was enjoying the excitement of the moment. "No more than the bench before you," he answered. "He himself had started out to make an offer for the skin, but he slipped on the ice and muddled his wits so that he did not even hear the yell or know how he got into the booth, until he found himself there with the fur before him——"

"Was it you who brought the fur into the booth?" Karlsefne interrupted him.

But Gard took the answer out of Brand's mouth: "No, it was I who did that. When the wild men began yelling and running, I saw Brand drop the skin and run after them; and I picked it up and brought it into the booth before I followed him. When I came back, Alrek was sitting there and asked me where he had been." He turned toward the high-seat as though he would address a word of apology to him who sat there, but the pause was shattered by an unpleasant laugh from Snorri of Iceland.

"I call Loke as witness," he ejaculated, "that though I have dealt with men in France and men

in England and all that are nearer than those, I have never seen given such a running-over measure of lies!"

"They are like saplings drifted ashore that one picks up for their good shape and finds to be worm-eaten," Karlsefne responded; and the violence of the anger he was holding back shook his towering frame and vibrated through his deep voice. "Yet should it be kept in mind that these two lied in order to assist a comrade. Only Alrek Ingolfsson lied for himself."

In his place Alrek the Chief arose, his lips forming a question; but Karlsefne stayed it with uplifted hand.

"I will make it plain that I do not wish to tempt you to further falsehood. I tell you openly that I know you to be the man who slew the Skraelling——"

"Slew?" repeated Alrek Sword-Bearer.

And "Slew!" cried the chorus of Champions; then divided into scattered cries: "It was his death-yell—" "They took it as a warning—" "The next time they come, it will be in war-clothes."

Hearing this last, Brand hammered the table with his fist. "Now I know who killed him!" he cried joyfully. "It was Thorhall the Huntsman! More than anything else he wanted to break off trade with the Skraellings and stir the camp to discontent——"

"Now your tongue goes faster than your mind," the Iceland chief interrupted him. "That trading day the Huntsman spent with me, setting traps in the wood far north of here."

Brand shot his arrows desperately: "Then it was Ale the Greedy! Or Fat Faste!"

But from the quarter where the Greenland guests sat, rose resentful cries: "Faste was off all day fishing with me—" "I myself saw Ale in the group before the Lawman's door!" "You take too much upon yourself!" "Remember that the spoils were found in your booth!"

The Red One stood with empty quiver. And Gard left his place and went and laid clumsy hands upon the Lawman's cloak.

"I swear that it was not Alrek but I who brought the skin into the booth. I take oath that I am telling the truth this time," he said.

"*This* time!" the Lawman repeated, so that the blood was rasped into Gard's swarthy face.

"Nay, it was to help Brand that I lied before," he pleaded.

"And this time it is to help Alrek!" Karlsefne finished. "Learn, boy, once and for all, that you can not spend your wealth and have it also in your pouch. Learn now and forever that your word buys nothing when the pouch of your honor is empty." Casting him off as he would have spoken further, he turned upon the red-cloaked figure of the Sword-Bearer, standing rigidly erect before the high-seat. "Too long, Alrek Ingolfsson, have you hidden behind this shield; show now the boldness which should be in your blood. That you lied because you wished to keep my good opinion, I can guess. That you fell not upon the Skraelling treacherously nor yet in greed of his property, I do you the justice to believe. It may even be that he gave provocation to your mad temper by seizing your weapon. I expect that you will acknowledge yourself guilty and submit to me."

Their glances clashed like blades as Alrek turned his high-borne head.

"You can decide over my life, but I will never acknowledge that," he said. "May the gallows take my body if I knew aught of the happening until your own lips told of it. I say, moreover, that it is unjustly done to accuse me of it only because others have juggled with the truth and because it looks as though mine were the hand which had brought the spoils hither."

That, at least, did not lack boldness. Flinging the broken staff from him, Karlsefne made a stride forward; the veins of his forehead swelled out white against purple. "This case has not yet been fully tried," he said. "I have not told that those are my only reasons. Another proof is this, which my own hand took from the Skraelling's head into which it had bitten so deeply that not even his fall down the bank had dislodged it." From his belt, where his cloak had hidden it, he drew forth the stone hatchet, discolored with dark stains.

To Alrek of Norway it was like a trick of magic; his jaw fell and he recoiled against the high-seat. "My hatchet!" he breathed.

Then the sheeted lightning of Karlsefne's eyes

was loosed upon him. "Tempt me with no more defiance lest I forget that I am a Lawman and strike you dead where you stand! Recollect that I also am of Viking stock, and tempt me not! Come down from the seat in which you were never worthy to sit; put off the cloak whose soldierliness you have disgraced; unbuckle the sword you can not be trusted to wear."

It was as though the Viking blood in Ingolf's son were a tiger that had been wakened by a blow. Straightening with a terrible inarticulate cry, he leaped to the floor and over the fire, his sword gleaming in his hand before they knew he had drawn it.

But the Lawman's might-full figure neither gave back nor moved; the blaze of his eyes neither weakened nor swerved. Tiger-like, the boy's eyes wavered and fell aside; he halted, uncertain.

Karlsefne's voice was as the voice of thunder: "I am over-chief in Vinland."

The flesh defied, but the soldier-drilled spirit heard. Slowly, Alrek put up hands that shook from passion and unfastened the clasp on his

shoulder. With a soft sound the drapery fell and lay like a blood-pool around his feet. Slowly and yet more slowly, he changed his hold upon his weapon and extended it as it had never gone before —hilt forward.

Receiving it, the Lawman finished the sentence amid deathlike stillness: "Hereafter, wear no color of soldiers, nor carry any more weapons than the beasts whose uncontrol you show. You, Champions of Vinland, get you another chief." Signing to Snorri to open the door he left the booth, the Icelander following.

Spellbound, the revelers remained without sound or motion, until Brand flung himself at the feet of Ingolf's son, thrusting into the brown hand one of his own knives.

"You foretold that you should kill me some time," he whispered, and bared his breast for the blow.

Those who saw the eyes the Viking bent upon him, believed that he would do it; it was seen that his fingers closed upon the haft. Then suddenly they thrust it from him with such force that its owner was thrown backward.

"Keep away," he said hoarsely. "Keep away!" With hands flung out to keep them off, he walked past them; and the door opened upon him and the night swallowed him up.

PART THIRD

THE HUNTSMAN'S PREY

CHAPTER XV

ABOUT THE-FIRE-THAT-RUNS-ON-THE-WAVES

WHERE an arm of the big Vinland bay met a narrow river so far inland that it was hard to tell when bay ended and river began, the band of Vinland Champions was at work. Before the invasion of their young voices, the stillness of the primeval forest had taken flight; and the age-old trees had fallen victim to the greed of their young hands even as the old-world cities were falling before the might of the young North. On the river bank, sweating in the June sun, some of them were toiling to bring a great log down to the stream which was to float it on to the building place. Along the edge of the clearing, others were busy lopping from the fallen monarchs their green crowns. And the song of axes, ringing from the depths of the cool shade, told of conquests still in progress. This last task, however, was so nearly completed that in the intervals of their work the

choppers talked of the untrimmed logs as though they were already in the form of a ship.

"What we stand in need of is red paint for that hull—" "If Gudrid will only make the sail—" "—so long as we get gilding for the dragon's head, I do not care—" "The dragon's head will be a weapon in itself!" "I expect the wild men will run at sight of it!" "There will not be many to equal this ship when it is done."

Lowering his ax to moisten his palms, Brand cast his bright impatient eyes around severely. "If ever it is done," he supplemented. "At this rate, it is the summer which will be finished first. If we had worked as we should have done, it would be completed now."

"Then why did you not work as you should have done?" laughed Ketil the Glib."

And Erlend, pausing to take a gauzy fanged fly off his neck, observed: "Certainly I think you ought to be the last one to make a fuss. Every time I have told you off to work on it, you have preferred to go hunting, or even help Karlsefne's men with the fence."

"What difference what I prefer?" the Red

One retorted. "You are the chief; it is your duty to see that work is done as it is necessary."

The difficulty of answering that, left Erlend rubbing his plump neck in silence; and in the pause Brand returned to work, swinging the ax over his shoulder with a forcefulness which brought it near to smashing the head of a man who had just appeared in the underbrush behind him.

"It is my advice that you see what you are doing," the man spoke in a harsh voice which they recognized.

It was but faintly that Brand was apologetic as he glanced around. "Why do you creep up like a cat if you are not willing to risk something?" he inquired, and aimed another stroke.

But for once Thorhall the Huntsman did not dismiss them in contempt. Breast-high in saplings he lingered, regarding them with curiosity; when he had swallowed the irritation attendant upon dodging, he spoke politely: "My excuse is that if the leaves had not muffled my steps, I should have missed hearing tidings of great interest. I ask of you to tell me what all this is about a ship?"

"How does that concern you?" muttered Gard the Ugly.

Erlend, however, lowered his ax readily. That there should be any one willing to listen to the ship-plan who had not already heard it as many times as he would endure, seemed too good for belief. Feigning that his ax edge needed attention, he drew out a sharpening-stone; and while he plied it, he talked happily.

The ship, he said, was to be so long and so wide, with a fore-deck to shelter the provisions, but nothing so womanish as a cabin. The mast was to be that pine-tree yonder, and the sail was to be woven by Gudrid, Karlsefne's wife—that is, they were going to ask her to do it for them—and he thought the colors would be red and yellow, and the name would probably be The-Fire-That-Runs-On-The-Waves. It sounded very well as he told it; gradually Brand's blade also became silent, and Ketil and Harald and half a dozen others crept nearer to listen with kindling eyes that now and again shot triumphant glances at the Huntsman.

It was something of a triumph to make him who was usually so sneering listen so respectfully.

When the recital was finished, he was even flattering.

"Certainly you are foremost among youths in energy! Where is it your intention to voyage when The Fire is built?"

Gard, who alone had kept on working, gave his tree a resounding blow. "How does that concern you?" he demanded a second time. "You will not be invited to take the steering oar."

Now any one can see that it is bad manners to insult a man who is complimenting you. Eight glances fixed the Ugly One angrily, while Erlend spoke in mild reproof:

"What is the need of talking in that way?" he asked him; then, to the Huntsman: "If the ship is done before the summer is, we are going against the Skraellings. It comes like a piece of luck that there is enmity between us; otherwise I do not know whom we could fight."

"Since it is unadvisable to do what we want and fight Karlsefne," Brand added vindictively; and there was a murmur of acquiescence.

The Huntsman's eyes, trained to detect prey in the very darkness, went from one to another of the

young faces. "Now that is a strange way to speak of the Lawman," he remarked.

The answers rose in his face like a covey of birds: "How else would you expect us to speak?" "—after the way he behaved toward Alrek Ingolfsson—" "I think he deserves worse words—" "To my backbone I hate him!"

Parting the sapling screen, the Huntsman came out and seated himself on a prostrate tree, as though he found the field worthy of his attention. "Yet it is a foolish way after all," he began, "for only see how Alrek's bane has been Erlend's good fortune——"

The Amiable One's handsome brown face flushed. "We have given no thanks on that score, nor shall give any," he answered hastily. "I have seen Alrek only once since the day that bad luck overtook him, and then I dared not speak to him; but the first chance I get, I shall offer the chiefship back."

The murmur which greeted that was almost a cheer; only Thorall made a sound of dissent.

"Now do you act after the manner of boys rather than of men," he said. "Pity Alrek Ingolfs-

son you may if you will, but in so doing you should not undervalue the leader you have got in his——"

"Now what trap are you baiting?" grumbled Gard, at the same instant that Erlend interrupted.

"I beg of you to leave that and give us instead your advice how the Skraellings may be found. You, more than any other, know the secrets of the south country."

Some of the band drew breath rather quickly as their chief said that, and looked to see the Huntsman rise in offense; but again he surprised them. Re-crossing his legs and settling his broad back against a stump, he did nothing worse than to sit gazing away at the sunshine of the open. His voice was still amiable when at last he spoke:

"It would be useless to deny that many wonders may be told of the south country. I will begin by telling you that it contains bigger game than Skraellings and—" his hand strayed to the deer-skin cord looping his neck and ending in the breast of his stained green tunic—"and more valuable things than furs." He paused to cough, and no one moved for fear of breaking the spell. He

recovered himself with a covert smile. "It may be that I will even do better than telling you. What should you say if I would show you the paths that lead to the treasure? I have some thought of going south myself this summer——"

Gard answered with an unexpectedness that made them jump: "I should say that we were rabbit-brained if we allowed you to lead us anywhere! Because Erlend is caught with your chaff, it is not proved that you can trap us all. I would not follow you a pace. To your face I tell you that I believe it was your hand that slew the Skraelling, though your body was further off than could be seen by a raven hovering in the sky!" He broke off and began making rune-signs with his fingers, as the small eyes turned toward him.

But it was not the Huntsman's anger which he had to reckon with, but the resentment of those who feared to lose a tidbit from their watering mouths.

"Hold your tongue!" "You know that is an old woman's story—" "For what purpose should you interfere?" "You are not all of us!" the mouths growled, while the elbows belonging to

them made themselves felt admonishingly in his ribs.

Erlend spoke with unprecedented severity. "You have no right to show enmity toward a man who is behaving well toward you. You may take your choice either to go off by yourself or else sit down and keep quiet like the rest of us."

Nine times out of ten, Gard would have subsided in sulky submission; but this was the tenth time. Moving toward the bush whereon his cap and bow and quiver hung as on a rack, he sent the Huntsman a glance of such hatred as springs from fear.

"I choose the best company," he said; and gathering up his things, he slung his ax over his shoulder and slouched away. Those at work in the clearing refrained from addressing him when they saw the expression of his swarthy face; and those toiling on the river bank agreed with polite alacrity when he deigned to growl in passing that the day was unbearably hot.

It was, moreover, easier to assent to that remark than to deny it. Far and near, blue water and green land were ablaze with sun. When the Ugly

One had forded the river and plowed through the treeless meadows where Karlsefne's cattle stood knee-deep in the reed-fringed pools, his linen clothes were wet on his body; and he gave up a vague plan to spend his unexpected holiday in fishing.

"There will be fewer chances of the juice drying in my skull if I go to that wood place where the red berries grow," he decided, and struck across the grove toward the camp to leave his burden in the booth.

The camp was not so easily entered as of old, for now there rose around the twelve huts a fence of mighty logs with sharpened tops; and at each of the three gates there stood a man on guard. Yet neither was the watch strict enough to justify the precautions of Strong Domar who chanced to hold this post. With his joyous bellow, he promptly barred the passage with his spear until the newcomer had answered a catechism that began by asking his age and ended by demanding a list of the things he had eaten for breakfast. The Ugly One's patience had run as dry as the Strong One's power of invention, by the time he was permitted to make his exasperated entrance. Repulsing a

pack of affectionate hounds, he stamped across the clover-sprinkled grass and would have stamped into the booth if he had not glimpsed through the open door a figure that had come to seem, almost as much as Hallad's, to belong to another world,—the gaunt form of Alrek the Exile, rummaging in the chest which had been his treasure-box in the days of his prosperity and still remained reverently untouched. Evidently he had known that at this hour the booth would be empty, for there was no watchfulness in his ears; he neither heard nor saw when his comrade stopped on the threshold and stood gazing at him.

It seemed to Gard that he had never seen so great a change in any one. From the unkempt brown hair to the black cloak that hung about his heels in rusty rags, he was as different from what he had been as November from June. His face showed the change most of all, for no glow of red was left in the brown, and his eyes were like cinders out of which the fire had died. From Gard's throat there burst suddenly a dry sob; and before the Swordless could move, his one-time follower was kneeling before him, clutching at his tattered cloak.

"Alrek! Come back and let me make it up to you. I can not sleep at night with thinking what I brought upon you. I beg you to come back!"

When he had stood a while looking down at him, Alrek spoke with suppressed scorn: "Are you still trying to spend your money and keep it too? You do not want to bear the burden of your deed, yet you knew when you slew him that some one must suffer for it——"

"I slay him? I did not! I did not! I only told that lie——"

"So that I repeated it and became also a liar. I would not believe you though you swore with your hand on the Boar's head. You tried to take back the weapon which Brand gave, and the Skraelling resisted and you struck—with my hatchet which you had found where it dropped when I fell. I tell you I would not believe you though you took oath on the Cross. Let go my cloak and get away from me. If you had more than a dog's wit you would know better than to talk of making it up to me; you would know that I am disgraced forever. Let go my cloak before I kick you away as I would a dog." Freeing himself, he was gone.

Gard reached the door only in time to see him pass out of the gate, Domar eagerly saluting; then the forest took him again into its silent keeping.

Thrusting his hands through his belt, the Ugly One leaned against the casing and spoke heavily to the hound that had left a noonday nap to come and fawn upon him. "It is likely that we have low minds as he says, Fafnir. . . . Yet, for all he says, we are faithful. . . . We do not lay it up against a friend if it happen that he ill-use us. . . ." Seeing the bristles begin suddenly to rise along the hound's spine, he looked up to find Thorhall the Huntsman swinging past over the grass. He finished with a sound very like the one coming from the dog's great throat: "And both of us can tell a foe when we see him!"

CHAPTER XVI

PROVING THAT ALREK'S EMPTY HANDS WERE FULL OF POWER

"A SAIL is not a small thing to ask for," Gudrid observed,—then raised a finger hastily as Erlend would have pleaded his cause. "You will put me in the most disobliging temper if you wake the child! As far off as the table I heard him crying, and came and found that it had happened as I suspected, that Roswitha had slipped out and left him. And he would not be quieted unless I got a cord and looped it around his feet and let him hold the ends and play at driving horses while he went to sleep!" She laid a hand on the Amiable One's silken sleeve, and another on the arm of Brand Erlingsson, and drew them gently off the dangerous ground out into the great back door-yard where the four households of Vinland sat in that contented idleness which follows the evening meal.

Roundabout the grassy space the stockade rose in grim foreboding; but the three gates opened wide upon shadowy grove and silvered meadow, and their three guards left their posts at will to bandy jests with their comrades at the long tables under the trees. Over the juice of the Vinland grape the men were lounging contentedly, while the cook-fires sank into red embers, and the moon sailed up from the tree-tops and floated free in the blue above them.

"It is certainly a night to bewitch one into promising anything! You choose your time well," Gudrid said with a little shake of the sleeves she was holding.

Brand moved his arm away abruptly; there was a limit to the liberties which even one who was asking a favor could endure. Erlend, however, was always affable.

"That will be seen if you grant our request," he answered. "It could not take you long, Gudrid, if you are such a weaver as you consider yourself. And I promise you that you should not lose by it, for we would bring you back a fine present from our journey. The ship is well begun

now. We delayed about the sail as late as possible in the hope that Alrek would come back and do the asking for us. We know that his favor is no less with you because trouble has come on his hands."

Gudrid's face lost some of its wonted sweet serenity. "Alas, my kinsman!" she sighed. "I wish my favor could do something useful for him. I can tell you that even the child is full of longing for him. Time and again, when he hears a step that is like Alrek's, he turns his eyes toward the door and cries when it is not his kinsman who comes in."

The three walked a little way in silence; Erlend frowning perplexedly at the ground, Brand kicking the heads off the clovers in the sullen discomfort which this subject always aroused in him. Presently Gudrid came slowly to a standstill.

"I am going yonder to speak with Jorund, Siggeir's wife," she said. "I do not say that I will not do your weaving for you, but I must see first how it goes with my dairy work. In the meanwhile, I wish you luck with your undertaking."

"That is no worse than a promise," Erlend returned blandly, "for if you do in truth wish us luck, you will help us all you can." And they departed from her in high feather to tell their comrades of the boon granted.

Standing where they had left her, Gudrid pondered a while whether she really would cross the grass to the spot where Jorund and the two other Greenland women gossiped beside a doorstep, or whether she would go into the booth where Karlsefne sat with his chiefs over a chart. There was a matter of cheeses that she particularly wished to discuss with Jorund, and yet it would be interesting to hear whether the Lawman had seen any trace of Skraellings in his trip that day. Considering, she put a hand up to finger her amber necklace, as was her habit, and made the discovery that it was not there. She took her hand away with a gesture of impatience.

"Now will Karlsefne laugh at me, for he has always said that this would happen if I allowed Snorri to play with it! I remember that it was by the river, where I sat with him this afternoon. I gave it to him to bite, and then it happened that

he dropped it to reach out for the boat which Biorn was rowing past; and Biorn called to me, and I forgot to pick it up again. Tch! What a stupid business! It is in my mind to slip out and get it before any one notices that it is gone. The exact spot is known to me."

Going over to the western gate, she looked out toward the shining river. Less than a dozen trees dotted the space between her and the little knoll on the bank where she had rested, and the moon made it almost as bright as day. She gathered up her trailing kirtle with prompt decision.

"Any Skraelling small enough to hide in those shadows, is not big enough to be afraid of," she said, and passed out quickly with her firm light step.

That anything besides Skraellings might lurk in the shadows, she seemed to forget. Reaching the bank, she sent one look of admiration out over the radiant river, then bent her gaze to the foot of the tree among whose roots her fingers were swiftly feeling. To look up into the branches she had no thought whatever.

Yet not ten paces from her, Death lay along a

bough,—Death in a tawny body with eyes like fire and a tail like a serpent, noiselessly lashing the air as the graceful form crouched for a spring.

The first warning she had was when a voice she knew spoke sharply from the shadows before her: "Lie down on your face!" The catastrophe came only a breath after the warning. As she threw herself forward, something leaped over her and met something else in mid-air. There was the jar of heavy bodies striking the earth, a crackle of breaking twigs, and the silver stillness was profaned by a horrible sound of snarling and long-drawn gasps.

Clutching at the tree-trunk, she tried to pull herself to her feet; but the two struggled on the very skirt of her robe and held her pinioned. Only over her shoulder she caught a glimpse of the giant cat, where it lay on its back, clutching in its claws the boy who knelt on its lashing body with no other weapon against the gaping jaws than his bare brown hands. It seemed to her that she shrieked, and it is certain that she swooned; for the next thing she knew, she lay on her face in the grass with Alrek bending toward her.

"It is over," he said briefly, and dragged a heavy weight from her skirt.

Pulling herself to her feet, she leaned dizzily against a tree, staring down at the strange monster that had the shape of a cat and the size of a hound.

"You choked him?" she whispered.

The Swordless One nodded. "There was no other way. Last week I saw him leap down upon a deer and suck the blood from its throat. I thought then that my hands on *his* throat would be my only chance if ever we had dealings together. Yet I did not think that he would come so near the wall."

"It is God's miracle that you also chanced to be near it," she breathed.

"It is not all chance," he answered. "I have been here more than one night since they began to set the tables under the trees. Torchlight attracts other things besides sharks. It is like watching the red lights of the North, to watch the cook-fires shine on the branches; and when the men sing over their wine, the sound reaches out here so that it is almost the same as though I were among—" He came slowly to self-consciousness,

With no other weapon than his bare brown hands.

and turned away and gave his attention to sopping with his ragged cloak the blood trickling from his torn limbs.

The sight of wounds brought Gudrid instantly to her capable self. "Tch" she said; and tearing her apron into strips, she put his hands aside and fell to work with skilful swiftness. For a little, nothing was said between them.

Yet it was not of the bleeding flesh that either was thinking in the silence. More than once, Alrek insisted that the work was done and tried to pull away from her and escape; and as her fingers flew, her mind went even faster, seeking some means by which to bind up the bleeding spirit as well. Suddenly, with her eyes on the empty brown hands that were yet so full of power, the way was opened to her.

Looking up from where she knelt beside him, she spoke courageously: "Kinsman, there is little need that I should tell you what you know by yourself,—that although Karlsefne would grant you a pardon in payment for this help, he would not give you his faith, which is what you want."

Though he had not flinched from the touch of

her hand on his wounds, the boy winced under her words. "I want neither his faith nor his pardon!" he said between his teeth. "I beg you to let me go."

"Not until you have heard me," she answered. "I have said this to show you that I am not speaking soft lies, but the truth. Now I am going to tell you more truth; the right-minded thing for you to do is to come back to the band and live as one of the men, until some twist of the thread brings your rank back to you."

She worked a while after that without looking up, for she could feel his glance beating down upon her. After a time he said huskily:

"It is of no use . . . I am dishonored. . . ."

At that she raised her eyes with a hint of scorn. "It is true then that you did slay the Skraelling?"

He looked at her sorrowfully. "I had thought that you would believe in me, kinswoman."

"Why, so I did," she answered, "until I heard you say that you were dishonored. For if you did not touch the deed, how could it stain you?" Rising up, she laid her palms upon his breast and

made him give her eye for eye. "Did it make your hands helpless because no sword was in them to-night?" she challenged him. "I think I have never seen weapons more powerful; nor was your eye less quick to see my peril, nor your heart less brave to help me,—nay, you were twice brave that you came with empty hands! Will you belie the courage and honor which you know you have, because you lack the red cloth and the bit of steel that are the runes which stand for them? If you will, you are not the Alrek Ingolfsson that I had wished my child would be like."

Looking into his eyes she saw a fire, long quenched, kindle and burn; and her palms on his breast felt the deep breath he drew; nor did he have any words of disproof. Discreet as she was bold, she asked for no words of assent. Leaving him, she went and tried to lift the forepart of the limp body.

"Get this upon your back," she said. "The Champions will become glad at this."

Silently he obeyed, drawing the dangling paws over his shoulder so that the long body hung down his back like a tawny cloak. Slowly he followed

after as she turned and led the way toward the gate,—until they were within two spear-lengths of it and a hubbub of voices and laughter came out to them like a puff of wind. Then gradually his pace slackened, and she looked around to find that his face was flooded with painful color.

She had the impulse to reach out and catch hold of him; but it was the impulse which came to her lips that she acted on, speaking as quietly as she would have spoken to her child had he ventured too near the edge of a cliff: "I do not know whether it is to your mind to enter the camp with me, but it is the truth that I shall hear enough of my foolishness without having you lead me home as well as save me. If I slip through this gate, as I came, will you use the east one, which is also nearer your own booth?"

Then she knew that she had guessed aright, for once more he moved forward, and under his breath he answered: "Yes."

By the time she had gained the center of the green, she knew also that he had kept his word. Suddenly a joyous uproar went up from the tableful of Vinland Champions, and some were rolled

off the benches in the haste of others to get on their feet; and crossing the moonlit space beyond them, she saw a soldierly young figure with a mass of yellow fur swinging from his shoulder—saw him and then lost him in the throng that closed, cheering, about him.

Her firm sweet mouth relaxed happily. "That is the first step toward a good outcome," she said. "If the Fates have any justice in their breasts, they will attend to the rest." And from afar she beamed brightly on the group, even as the moon above was beaming upon her.

CHAPTER XVII

SHOWING HOW THE CHAMPIONS BROKE A THREAD IN THE HUNTSMAN'S NET

Over the boulders between which the narrow trail wound down to the building place on the beach, Thorhall's green eyes stared in surprise. After a three days' scouting trip, he had taken a roundabout way campward in order to get a glimpse of the vessel in whose progress he was interested, but it appeared that here was more change than he had anticipated.

Grown to all its graceful outlines the ship still waited on its rollers, high enough up on the shelving beach to rest immune from the whims of the tide. Around it and in it and under it the band worked as usual, whistling and wrangling amiably. But a pace to the right, where a rock humped through the gravel offered chance for a forge, there was a feature new to the scene,—a brown-haired young smith hammering vigorously at a bar of

glowing iron. If he did not whistle as he hammered, yet he worked as steadily as though he had always stood there; and above the hum could be heard Brand's voice, speaking with eager deference:

"Alrek, is it your opinion that a bolt is needed here, or will it be sufficient to tie this plank?"

While Ingolf's son made brief answer between the strokes of his hammer, the Huntsman descended the rest of the trail in scowling cogitation. When the noise of question and answer had subsided, he came out suddenly upon the beach.

"Hail to the chief!" he said.

If the salute was designed to ask a question as well as offer greeting, it served its purpose. The brown-haired smith did not even turn his head; it was still Erlend the Amiable who answered to the title, straightening quickly to give back nod for nod.

"Thorhall! Now I am glad you are back to release us from our promise to let no one know the secret of the south country. Tell Alrek without delay about the treasure-land you have found."

There was delay, however, in the manner in which the Huntsman moved forward, paused to

look at whatever addition in the boat interested him, paused to unwind a fetter of seaweed bubbles from his ankle, and finally seated himself on a boulder and studied the smith intently.

"Have you come back for good?" he inquired.

Before Alrek could speak, Gard—working behind him—answered by a jeer: "Some may have cause to think that he has come back for ill."

In the interests of peace Erlend raised his voice: "I beg of you, Gard, to turn fox for a while and go down the beach and dig enough clams to fill your cloak-skirt; so that we shall be fed, when noontime comes, without going back to the camp."

It seemed to the Huntsman that there was something suspicious in the docility with which Gard obeyed, somewhat as though he felt that he was leaving a sentinel behind him. The small eyes continued their study of the smith, as an angler might study a fish while he was considering what spear to employ. After a silence, which no one ventured to break, he spoke bluntly:

"The country south and west of here is inhabited by dwarfs. By that I do not mean merely

people who are small-shaped, but the Northern race that is skilled in metal-work. You remember that Tyrfing was forged by such? Now I think you have yourself a sword—I ask you not to blame me! I did not mean to press that wound. But at least it serves to make plain to you whom I mean. In this land, they live in caverns of the gold-bearing mountains of which the south and west country is full. I think I have described to you their homes?"

The band answered even rapturously: "Never shall I forget it!" "No king's palace could—" "I wish Alrek had heard—" "Tell over about that one with the golden roof—" "Yes, good Thorhall!" "Yes!" "Yes!"

It did not appear that Thorhall heard them; as a hawk might watch a coop for the appearance of the chickens, he was watching Alrek's mouth for the first word of doubt.

None came. Slowly, the smith's blows became further between. Presently he rested his hammer on the rock and his elbow on the hammer handle. "That is of the greatest interest," he said thoughtfully. "And it comes to my mind to wonder if it

could have been your dwarfs that Rolf Erlingsson saw when he was here with Leif the Lucky? He said those creatures were low as junipers, while Skraellings are most of them of good height—Yet he said also that they were poor and mean-looking! Your dwarfs must be as rich as Hnoss herself." He ended uncertainly.

But the Huntsman leaned back and smote his great knee with rare enthusiasm. "Now your comrades are right in valuing your wit above others!" he said. "Never had the thought come to me before, yet it is twice as likely as not. So cunning are they, that it would be altogether according to their custom to disguise themselves like Skraellings when they had the wish to spy upon strangers. It cannot be said that they have a fondness for strangers. You know that it was a dwarf who caused my wreck at Keel Cape?"

"No, that is a story you have not told us," the band cried eagerly.

He looked at them indulgently. "Now it is not much of a tale. The beginning of it is that I pried too deep into an old long-beard's secrets, so that I had to run for my life. I should be feasting on

boar-flesh in Valhalla now, if I had not left the boat with its stem toward the water and the oars in the row-locks; for we were no more than out of sight of land when the dwarf-man reached the shore." He paused to glance around the group. "I suppose you remember how King Skiold blew upon a passing ship so that the boom fell over and killed Eystein where he stood by the steering oar?" he inquired.

While they nodded impatiently, Alrek spoke in confirmation: "I believe that to be true, because once I met a Finnish sailor who could change the wind by turning his cap."

"You have seen so much of the world," the Huntsman said admiringly, "that it would become a great misfortune if you should lose this chance of seeing more wonders. To go on relating,—the dwarf used the same trick, though a little differently. Instead of blowing, he raised a gale only by flapping his cloak; and the water rose behind us in a sea-wall. I had often wondered what it would be like to be at the spot where a storm begins, and that time I found out. The water rose behind us with a roar, and swept us along past the entrance to

the Vinland bay until we struck the Keel bar, and the boat went to pieces and the other three went down and Thor saved me. Hallad felt very unwilling to drown. You remember I had on only one boot when you found me? I can remember feeling something pull at the other so that I thought a shark had me and gave it a strong kick off. Now I know that it was Hallad clutching at it. I suppose it was because he got bitter that I did not help him, that he comes back to haunt me."

"That would be in every respect like Hallad," Brand said scornfully. "He was always wont to expect some one to look out for him. Thorhall, will you not let us see that chain again, that Alrek may get it clear before his mind what great things are in store for us?"

It appeared from his manner that there was nothing Thorhall would not do to oblige them. "Willingly," he answered, and straightway undid the bag around his neck. Dropping their tools, they came and stood around him in so cosy a circle that the Ugly One, far down the beach, took one fist out of the oozy gravel it was raking to shake

it at them, and never knew that the other hand had turned up a clam until a jet of water struck him in the face.

If the necklace had sparkled in the gray light of the Wonderstrands, it may be imagined what it did here in the sun. Some of the gems encrusting it were blue as the bay before them, and some were like pearls in which a fire had been kindled, and some were like nothing less than stars. The Huntsman let Alrek reach out and take it for himself, and the young Viking drew a quick breath of pleasure as he felt its weight.

"Now I have seen booty taken from kings' palaces, but never anything to match this," he said. "It was without doubt the luck of our lives that we found you that day on the Wonderstrands. I remember overhearing you say to Faste that the reason you would not bring your news forward in the hall was because you did not want the chiefs to take the power out of your hands. I suppose the reason you share the secret with us is because we can give the help of a ship?"

Erlend looked up in surprise, the necessity of a reason for the Huntsman's cordiality not having

before occurred to him. The Huntsman looked out from under roughened brows, though he kept his words smooth.

"Now you do less than justice to your comrades' valor and accomplishments," he began. But he stopped as he saw one of Alrek's eyes close in good-humored derision.

"When is it your intention to sail?" the Swordless brought him back to the point.

The Huntsman reached out and took back his chain. "That you must ask your chief," he answered; and spite was so evident in his use of the title, that the Amiable One hastened to answer before he could be asked:

"I think it will take about five days more to finish the outfittings, and then two to stock it with food. If a fair wind blows on it, we can surely sail on the tenth day."

Slowly Alrek lowered the hammer he had raised to return to his work. "It must be that you are forgetting the Skraellings," he said. "Because the hunters have seen nothing of them, proves little; Leif Ericsson's men saw nothing of the dwarfs until they were upon them. It is a sure

sign, when a slain man is found lying on his face, that he will be revenged. Any day it may happen that they come; and if we should be away hunting gold while our camp-mates fought for their lives, we should get little fame though we brought back——"

The Huntsman rose to his gigantic height. "Are you the chief?" he snarled.

That was the third time he had pressed the wound; the flame in Alrek's cheeks sent sparks to his eyes as he wheeled.

"No, I am not the chief," he answered squarely, "but I have the right of every free man to make my voice heard in deciding matters, and I can tell you that it is going to be heard though you weave all the spells you know."

Perhaps the Huntsman did try to weave a spell, for he turned at once toward those who had so far obeyed his every move like snake-charmed birds. "What of you?" he hissed. "Will you put off this chance for treasure, to fight for the Lawman who disbelieved your oaths and showed disrespect to your high-seat?"

And the chorus answered him loudly: "No!"

And Brand made himself conspicuous by his fierceness. "Let the Skraellings cut blood-eagles in Karlsefne!"

It is likely that he wished directly after that he had kept still, for instead of praise, it brought him a look of scathing contempt from the Swordless.

"Now you talk like fools," the young Viking said, "to think to revenge private wrongs in wartime. He would be a fine soldier who because he had a grudge against his chief would desert in time of battle and leave his comrades to fight alone. No knife could scrape off this shame."

They quailed so under that, that the Huntsman's green eyes became like the eyes of a Vinland elk at bay. Turning where Erlend stood silent, he struck again:

"You then,—if you have any power who call yourself the chief!"

Erlend laughed uneasily; his handsome face had turned painfully red. "It seems that I was mistaken in thinking that that name belonged to me," he answered.

Crimsoning, Alrek fell from his hill of scorn to the valley of abashment. "Erlend, I meant no—no disrespect toward you," he stammered. "I did not mean to step out of my place—" He was obliged to stop, for Erlend's hand closed over his mouth.

"What are you talking about?" the Amiable One said sternly. "That is in no way what I mean. What you did was to step into the place that belongs to you." He exerted some of his strength to keep his palm where he had put it. "Listen to me! I am unfit to have the rule over anything. Never did it come into my head that leaving would be disloyal. I should have done a nithing thing which the saga-men would never have forgotten. I know of no better happening than that you should come into your own in time to save me." He stretched out his other hand toward the assembled Champions. "You shouted before when I said that I should offer the chiefship back. I shall think your tongues of little value if you keep them between your teeth now!"

The eagerness with which Brand offered the

first cheer seemed designed to make up for his blunder of the moment before. He was seconded by a deep roar from Gard, who had just come up with his burden on his back. After that, there was no separating the shouts that came; and they banged their tools against the ship in lieu of swords and shields.

When the racket had subsided, Erlend turned back to the Swordless with a smile that had yet a touch of haughtiness. "I shall take it as an insult to my pride if you ask me to keep what so plainly belongs to you," he said.

After a while Alrek looked up from the trenches his foot was digging in the sand. "I will accept it gladly, if Karlsefne will allow me to," he answered; and there was more cheering and all hands were stretched out to him.

All but two, that is; shifting uneasily from one foot to the other, Brand and Gard the Ugly stood aside nor dared make any advances.

The Swordless himself hesitated when finally he came to them, and his face caught some of their embarrassed color; but at last he put out his hand.

They gripped it eagerly, and there was more cheering.

Under cover of it the Huntsman turned and stalked away; and what had been angry suspicion as he descended the trail, was angry certainty as he stamped up it.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONCERNING A GRIM BARGAIN BETWEEN THE LAWMAN AND ALREK

"AND I will seek out Gudrid, whose counsel is good in everything," Alrek said as he and Erlend rose from the morning meal at the table under the trees, "if so be you give me leave to be late to the work."

"If so be you need leave from me, you have it for anything you do," Erlend answered.

Then the Amiable One and all the Champions not bound to kitchen-posts took their leisurely way through the cool green forest to the waiting ship; and Alrek the Swordless turned in the opposite direction and strolled past the empty tables and groups of trencher-laden thralls toward Karlsefne's booth.

Before the door-step small Snorri tumbled about in the clover, shouting lustily for his mother to come and play with him; which seemed to Alrek

so good a reason for expecting her prompt arrival that he troubled himself to go no further. Stretching his lithe length on the grass, he changed the cries into laughter by butting the crier over on his back each time he opened his mouth; and the maneuver was crowned with immediate success. After a very little time, Gudrid appeared in the door, a piece of sewing in her hand, inquiry in her blue eyes.

"Oh! That is why he stopped screaming!" she said with an accent of relief. "So long as he is crying, I know that he is safe. Now you are a lazy-goer, kinsman, to be lying on the grass when every one else is at work."

Shaking the clovers from his hair, Alrek sat up,—he would have stood up if it were not that the Frowner had crept across his feet. "I wait only to ask your advice, kinswoman, about a way to speak alone with Karlsefne. For two days I have looked in vain for a chance. I want to get his justice."

Coming out of the doorway, Gudrid seated herself on the step, and sat absently stabbing holes in her work with her bronze needle. "Justice is a

heavy weapon to challenge unless you are sure that you stand very firm on your legs, kinsman," she said at last.

He answered: "I stand very firm," and the sternness of his voice was in singular contrast to the gentleness of his hand as he stretched it out to steady the Frowner in his upward progress.

Watching them, Gudrid's pucker of anxiety smoothed into a fond smile. "Now certainly I know that you are guiltless," she said. "I have only to see your behavior toward the child to be sure of that." She did not continue her assurances for Alrek's mouth had curved into amiable derision.

"Why, that proves nothing," he said.

Gudrid's foot stirred the clovers. "I will give you the satisfaction of knowing that Karlsefne has made me the same answer. Sometimes it seems to me that a man's wit is like a bat, which disdains the good daylight to go about in, but must show its skill by finding its way in the dark! I can even guess that this very boldness of yours, which causes me to believe in you, will seem to the Lawman to be but another trick of your outlaw blood. Re-

member how they say in Greenland that a seal who tries to swim against too strong a current has often to turn back and be caught by the hunters. Kinsman, kinsman "—she put out her hand and pressed his shoulder—" be very sure of your strength!"

" Yes," he said, and bent his head to touch his lips to her fingers.

More than the words, the rare caress told her that his mood was no light one; and she warned no more. Rising, she spoke quietly: " I will do the only thing I can to give you help. Karlsefne is making the round of the meadows where the men are haying. I did not send his noon-meal with him—because I did not think it fitting that he should eat old bread, and the new is not yet out of the oven—but I had the intention to send it out to him by a thrall. Now if you choose you may carry it, and so get him apart for your purpose."

" That will serve well, and I give you thanks," Alrek answered.

Nodding, she went swiftly in to hurry the baking; and Alrek arose and setting the Frowner upon his shoulder paced to and fro in the sunshine that had settled over the camp like a golden

spell, subduing the bustle of morning activity to a drowsy drone.

Lulled by the hum and the slow motion, Snorri's yellow head began to nod, swaying and bobbing until it rested heavily upon the brown locks of his bearer. Gudrid received a bundle of sweet warm limpness in return for the basket and skin of ale which she finally brought out.

"It is not unlike gathering up a jellyfish," she laughed as she took him.

But Alrek's smile was faint in response. He had been thinking as he paced, and the gravity of what he was about to do was full upon him.

"I give you thanks," he said a second time, gently, and left her.

Outside, in the great free world beyond the wall, it seemed to him that everything was coaxing for a smile. The reach of woodland into which the grove deepened was alluring with the song of hidden brooks and spicy with the breath of pines and hospitable with berry thickets, black and red and blue as the river to which the wood finally gave way. The elms of the bank flaunted wreathing grape-vines; the rushes at the edge sported

dragon-flies like living jewels,—flashing in the sunlight, the river itself was one broad smile. Dull anger took possession of him when he found his spirits too heavy to rise in response.

"It may be that I should become a coward if this went on," he murmured. "I was not any too quick about making up my mind."

And when, a little further on, he came to a finger of the stream and saw on one of the mossy stepping-stones a water-snake struggling with a frog which was only half swallowed, he made no move to release the victim.

"Better to die whole than to live crippled," he told himself grimly, and kept on his way.

It seemed a very short way now before he came to the broad sunny valley whose fragrant basin was strewed with ripening hay, which men were tossing amid jests and laughter as became a crop planted without toil and raised without care. Spying him, they shouted greetings of good-humored banter; and he raised his hand mechanically, as his eyes roved to and fro seeking the blue-clad figure of the Lawman. It formed no part of the groups scattered over the valley, nor was it anywhere alone

in the open—Ah, yonder it was in the shade of the spreading willow that rose solitary in the middle of the meadow! A smile twisted Alrek's lips as he moved forward.

"I wonder," he mused, "if it is a bad omen that I find him ready under a tree."

At least his luck was good enough so that he found the Lawman alone, sitting where two rocks made a seat beneath the willow; nor did he turn away when he saw who it was coming toward him through the sunshine. Over the fist upon which his bearded chin was resting, he watched the approach immovably.

When Alrek had come up and saluted him, he answered: "I shall know better how to receive you when I hear your purpose in taking this service on yourself."

"Gudrid allowed me to do this that I might speak alone with you," Alrek made brief explanation.

It seemed that Karlsefne's challenging gaze relaxed a little. "There is the greatest reason why Gudrid should wish to aid you," he said, "and

scarcely am I out of your debt. I should be glad to hear that your errand hither is to ask a pardon from my gratefulness."

Sliding the ale-skin to the ground, the boy straightened proudly; but before he could answer, Karlsefne spoke on, unclenching his hand to pass it before his eyes:

"As you came toward me, you looked even as your father looked when he came to the Assembly Plain to hear the judges condemn him for his crimes; and now as then I hate the deeds and love the doer so that the two feelings are like two fires raging within me." Taking away his hand he showed the stern beauty of his face aglow with feeling, as some lofty rock under the touch of a red Northern light. "I beg of you to throw yourself upon my mercy. Defiance has gathered like drift-ice in your breast, shutting out all that would come through to bring you good. Break from it before it shuts you in forever. I beg of you to yield and give me the joy of trusting you again."

Ending, his deep voice held a note of yearning

love that made the boy's heart swell strangely in his breast. He had to speak hardly and shortly in order to be able to speak at all.

"Hard is it to know how to answer, for you offer me what I do not need. I came here to get your justice. If I broke your order, I deserve an evil death; if I did not, it is my right to live unshamed. If you know that it is I who slew the Skraelling, I ask you to have me placed against this tree and shot."

As a Northern light fades from a rock and leaves no warmth behind, so the glow faded from the Lawman's face. "Do you like it so well to die?" he asked.

"Sooner would I die than live as I have lived since your doom," Alrek answered.

Silence settled heavily upon them. When a great fly boomed out of the sunlit space and hung for a wink of time at the boy's ear, the sound seemed thunder-loud. But at last the Lawman spoke, his voice as hard as clanging iron:

"Not many men would go so far as to deal with me by force and overbearing, but you play the game as well as is to be expected of your

father's son. Though I am sure of your guilt, you are right in believing that I am not sure enough to take your life when you lay it in my hand. And since it is proved that I am not sure, I may not punish you at all. It is well played. There are two choices before you,—the one is to let matters stand as they are now, so that your life is safe and the future is yours to redeem your credit in; the other is to get back your honors as you demand, with the condition that if ever this case comes again before my high-seat and so much as a feather's weight more of evidence is given against you, I shall declare your life to be forfeit."

The long safe way is seldom the way of youth; one must have traveled far and fallen often to make that choice. The young Viking answered without hesitation: "I will take my honors and the risk."

Rising, the Lawman made him a chief's salute. "So be it," he said. "To-night in the hall, even as I took them from you, I will give them back before all eyes. In this and whatever follows, it shall be as you have chosen." He lifted his hand as the boy would have thanked him.

In obedience to the gesture, the Chief of the Champions halted and bowed before him in silence; but his brown head was carried high when he walked away, and his eyes were two radiant suns of hope.

CHAPTER XIX

RELATING THE ADVENTURE WITH THE MEN OF THE FOREST

LIKE dew on a fresh berry a silver gauze of mist lay over the fresh day, and the birds' answers to the sun were still far-between and sleepy, as Hjalmar Thick-Skull came out of the bayward gate and sauntered down the meadow-slope to the beach. Of late he had given over fishing in the river for fishing in the bay, where a flat island lay like a lily-pad on the water. With his tackle on his shoulder and a song on his lips, he came down where his boat was waiting and sent a careless glance around the horizon. Then the song was changed to a cry, and he went back up the slope in long bounds, deafening the man at the gate as he burst in upon him.

"Skraellings! Around the long point they are coming in shoals!"

Staring, the guards stammered the words after

him; but an Icelander who was passing caught them up with a roar and started on a run for Karlsefne's booth. The hounds lying under the trees leaped up and raced beside him, barking; out of every door that he passed uncombed heads were thrust, shouting questions. In the draft of a breath, the news had spread like fire.

Reaching the Chief of the Champions where he stood in his doorway, he sheathed the sword that he was polishing with so much pride and took a step toward the gate; then, bethinking himself of a quicker way to verify the report, he turned and made for a great pine-tree standing on a little knoll. With a run and a leap he went up the trunk, and clambered from one great bough to the next as though they were steps, until his head came out through the last layer of needles.

The Thick-Skulled had spoken truly. The bright plain of the bay was specked with dark skin-boats; eastward around the longest of the capes, they were like a dark tide rolling in upon the land. Something seemed to tighten in the Sword-Bearer's throat; and he was about to turn and let himself down swiftly to the bough below,

when his eye was caught by a movement up the river bank, the passing of something dark athwart the green of a bush. Drawing his head down under the green roof, he hung by his arms, gazing intently. There was no open anywhere for the Thing to cross, and just that dark streak flitting through the bush-tops told nothing—and yonder was a white streak behind it! And beyond that a dark one! His hands tightened on the branch so that it crackled. Unless motes were dancing before his eyes, the bush was alive with the fleeting wisps, shapeless, soundless, but bearing down upon the camp. His heart seemed to turn over in his body, and he dropped like an ape from limb to limb.

Descending into the camp was like falling from the peacefulness of a masthead into the roar of the ocean. Wrangling and stamping about, the men were struggling into their shirts of ring-mail. Hammering on their shields to get attention, the chiefs were shouting orders. Bearing messages and distributing weapons, thralls rushed back and forth, followed by the yelping of dogs and the screaming of bondwomen from the doorways. It

took main force on the part of the Champions' leader to get them aside and make them understand that it was not the enemy before them against whom they were to turn their blades.

"The number of those in the boats is so many times greater than we, that no men can be spared from the front," he concluded swiftly. "To find out what these Things are, and defend the gates against them, will be our share. And it is likely that much depends upon our getting into position without loss of time. Olaf and the Hare, I appoint to be my messengers; and I want to give Olaf a message now, while the Hare goes after my ring-shirt." Drawing the Fair One aside, he spoke forcefully in his ear until he yielded reluctant obedience and darted away in the direction of the pastures.

It may be admitted that reluctance was in most faces when a little later they turned their backs upon the uproar of the camp and stole out into the loneliness of the grove. Over their shield-rims, their eyes rolled apprehensively as their chief spread them into a broad crescent covering both gates, and led them warily forward. When the

first high ground gained failed to reveal anything, they jumped at the idea that he had been mistaken in his spying, that the sun had dazzled his eyes, that what he had seen was but a line of low-flying swallows. They were urging it eagerly at the very instant that he was justified.

All at once it was as though every twig in the undergrowth ahead had turned into a bow, and the bow had shot an arrow at them. The rattle on their iron helmets was like the pelting of hail. If their bodies had not been armored, they would have gone down as grain before a scythe.

Alrek's voice rang out strongly: "Skraellings! Under cover! Make ready for their charge!"

In a flash they had leaped backward, behind trees, bushes, boulders, anything. The sunbeams broke into jagged lightnings as the bright swords sprang from the scabbards.

But no flesh appeared from the thicket beyond. The grove remained empty and silent as a grave. It shattered the stillness startlingly when Njal screamed:

"If they are Skraellings, why do they not come out and show themselves?" Then, without

pausing for reply, he added another shout: "Those in the boats have landed!"

From the camp behind them swelled a din of Skraelling yells answered by Norse battle-cries, enforced at regular intervals by the hoarse barking of the leaders.

Njal cried shrilly: "*That* is the way in which Skraellings fight! These are trolls! Let us get loose from their net and turn back."

Only Alrek's uplifted spear stayed the rush. "I think you will find my weapon sharp if you do," he warned. "Whether they be men or trolls, we must take heart as we can and hold them from the gates. I urge you all to grip your swords and manfully hold your ground. They can not do you harm while you are under cover."

But it was not their bodies that they were afraid with, but their minds which had raised up specters. The sunlit space seemed all at once a cloak for shapes of horror. Dreading with every breath that the cloak would be drawn aside, their eyes shrank from what it might reveal as their flesh would not have shrunk from knives. They spoke as with one voice:

"This is jugglery and trickery only! We will go back where men fight against men!"

"You will not," spoke Alrek the Chief between his teeth. But even as he said it, he saw the hopelessness of expecting to hold them quiet, and made his last move. Throwing aside his spear he leaped out in front of them, brandishing his sword. "If you must move—move forward!" he cried. "You are nithings unless you follow my fate!"

Even then it is not certain that they would have obeyed if Brand had not redeemed much by promptly advancing to his chief's side.

"*I* follow!" he shouted; and Erlend and Gard were only a step behind him.

At that, the rest turned like sheep and came after, dodging from cover to cover, clambering, stumbling, ducking, jumping, lashing their courage with a fury of yelling.

Before the cold stillness had chilled them again, they saw the foe. Rising from behind boulders, slipping around trees, gliding through bushes, came creatures with gaudy-colored bodies naked as earthworms, and bristling black heads feathered like monstrous birds; so like and yet so hideously

unlike the Skraellings, that Gard cried "Forest devils!" and the band turned with one impulse for flight. But behind them, across the ground they believed they had cleared, in the space between them and the gates, stretched another line. Out of their frenzy of fear, sprang a frenzy of hate; and they leaped upon the creatures with drawn swords and the others met them, brandishing stone hatchets.

For a time it was a wild game of dodging, with death as a penalty for awkwardness. Whether they were men or demons, the hatchet-bearers showed a dread of steel which kept them hovering beyond arm's reach whenever they were not darting at an opening. But at last the hungry swords tasted the flesh they craved, and their wielders' shouts of triumph stirred the rest to exulting excitement.

"We will wipe them out like flies!" Alrek cried.

Even as the words left his lips, he made a startling discovery. Laying low the figure in front of him, he glanced over his shoulder to make sure that there was no one behind him; and turned back

to find a man standing on the very spot that he had cleared. Striking him down, he whirled to see another hideous shape in the place that—a breath before—he had made empty.

At the same instant, Brand cried wildly: "It seems to me that they must rise from the dead since no matter how many one kills, there is always the same number confronting him."

Into Alrek's throat came the sense of choking which had seized him in the tree-top when he beheld that dark tide rolling in upon the land. Something seemed to mock in his ear: "It will be like killing the flies of the air one by one!" Then blotting out this came the wonder that Brand's voice should seem so far away; and he risked a glance around the grove, and his heart stood still.

In their mad charge, the Champions had broken their line; until now no two fought shoulder to shoulder but each stood alone, his back against a tree or a rock, a circle of hatchet-men around him. Even while their chief looked, three Champions were tempted into making dashes which carried them still wider apart. It would not be long before they would be lost to one another's sight, and the

swarms would close in around them—He opened his mouth to send forth a frantic recall.

But the fiend-cunning of the black eyes watching him seemed to read his purpose on his lips. Suddenly the shapes around him raised an unearthly howl, which those on all sides caught up and kept up until the din was like a wall through which no sound could come or go.

Alrek's hands continued to fight from instinct, but his brain became numb. The horror long hovering over him settled lead-like upon him.

"They *are* trolls!" he told himself; and his strength began to ooze out of him in icy droops.

He did not turn his head when above the din rose a roar even more appalling than the yells. When the creatures around him dropped their weapons to fly frantically this way and that, he remained standing where they had left him, plucking at an arrow which had pierced his arm below his mail. Gazing wonderingly, he saw a huge milk-white bull with mouth afoam and eyes like red flame come snorting out of the thicket, pausing now to paw up the earth before him, now to throw back his horned head with a terrific bellow.

Then, in a flash, his wits came back to him. Memory reminded him that his own lips had bidden Olaf drive the animal from the pasture for their reenforcement; and sense told him that—even as he had hoped it might happen—the hatchet-bearers had taken the apparition to be the white man's god, come to his people's aid. Leaning back against the tree, he began to shake with laughter which was half weeping.

It seemed to little Olaf the Fair that there was something peculiar about the bearing of all the Champions, when a while later he met them back near the gates. Their greetings came in voices of unsteady shrillness, and their eyes were strangely bright. He said, pouting:

"I do not know whether you mean that the fight went against you or that you got the victory, but I warn you that I shall dislike it if you upbraid me for fetching the bull there so soon. I have got scolded enough by the men in camp. It appears that they spent the first part of the battle in running away from arrows, and they had only just got to work with their swords when I came through with the Bellower and sent the Skraellings flying

to their boats. I thought the Icelanders would have thrashed me. I shall not take it well if you also find fault——"

Their shaking high-pitched laughter drowned his voice.

"We will try to excuse you," Alrek said in a drawl that was still rather unsteady; whereat there was another outburst; and they swept clamoring shrilly through the gate.

Inside the wall it looked at the first glance like a trading day, with shining-shirted groups scattered everywhere across the green, each man flourishing some kind of weapon while he talked at the top of his great lungs. But at a second glance the resemblance was less, for no fair-time mood was in the mien of Karlsefne and his chiefs where they stood under the council-tree, wiping the paste of sweat and blood from their faces; and here and there men were writhing on the earth while the sharp knives of comrades cut arrow-heads out of their flesh. And suddenly the likeness ceased altogether, as four men came through the bayward gate, each pair carrying between them the body of a dead Icelander. Silence touched each group the

four passed; and through the hush, Karlsefne's voice clanged out like a bell, vibrating with wrath:

"I wonder at it that you have control enough left to hold your teeth over your tongues when the dead are borne past! Up to this time you have run mad like wolves that have tasted blood. I suppose the strange thing is not that you have broken the peace-bands at last but that I was able to hold your beast-cravings so long in check. It is all I can find to lessen the gall of my defeat."

So long as he stood before them, fixing them with his eyes like swords, they remained silent; but the booth door had no more than closed behind him than the excitement leaked out again. In a little while it was running as high as ever, as the men boasted of the great feats they had been on the verge of achieving, and vowed exulting vows about what they would do at the next meeting. It was plain indeed that the peace-bands which had held their swords in their scabbards were snapped forever.

CHAPTER XX

SHOWING HOW THE HUNTSMAN BAGGED HIS GAME

THE next day, under a storm-charged sky, the camp lay storm-charged. In the doorways, men stood talking restlessly, with now and again an outburst of sharp wrangling; out on the green, others refreshed their knowledge of spear-throwing; around the tables, still others plied sharpening stones upon ax blades which would never be used for trees. Setting forth with their last load of outfittings for the ship, the Champions shouted a battle-song in the face of the muttering thunder:

> "And as the foeman's ships drew near
> The dreadful din you well might hear;
> Savage Berserks roaring mad,
> And champions fierce in wolf-skins clad,
> Howling like wolves; and clanking jar
> Of many a mail-clad man of war."

"Let us not try to settle in another place until we are off our feet on account of old age," Brand

spoke with energy. "Karlsefne says truly that Norsemen are too wolf-like to endure it when they are penned like sheep. Let us live like Fridtjof the Bold, with the ship for our hall and the sky for our roof."

"And strike where we choose," Erlend added. "There is no good reason why we should never make warfare against any but dwarfs. I have heard it said that fine things are to be found in Ireland——"

"And in England—" "And in Rolf's country—" "And the East—" cried a chorus; and each began at once to urge the merits of his particular choice amid an eager clamor that was interrupted only by their arrival at the path which wound down between the boulders.

There, however, the interruption was final. Glancing over the boulders, the first boy shrieked: "What!" the second one: "Where—?" then, all together, they roared: "The ship!" and tumbled one over the other and out upon the beach. Save for the rollers which lay where they had left them, not a vestige was to be seen of The-Fire-That-Runs-On-The-Waves.

Some of them cried: "The tide!" while others cried: "Skraellings!" And one detachment went swarming up the trees of the bank to sweep the length and breadth of the bay; and the other, drawing swords, raced along the shore to explore the crescent curves with which it was scalloped. But neither party brought back any news to the third group, that seemed as yet unable to do more than stand staring at the rollers and ejaculating. The clue came from a peevish voice on the bank above them:

"I think you have little reason to boast of your eyesight if it has not yet told you that I am here." Above the rocks a thin face rose, wanly white in the glare of the lightning that was shivering across the sky.

Shrieking: "Hallad!" the band whirled up the beach like wind-driven sand; and their chief had taken several steps to follow them before he pulled himself up and turned around to face the intruder firmly.

"This looks to be an evil happening, if any one thinks you to be of importance, which I do not. No fault of ours is it that you were drowned. Why

do you not stay under the water with the other dead men?"

The colorless lips showed a curl. "Dead men! Do you think that if I had a ghost's power I would allow Thorhall to bind me, and stay up here to be made a gazing-stock——"

"Thorhall!" Alrek repeated; and he came a step nearer, so that Brand and Erlend and the Ugly One, pausing in their flight to look around for him, took courage and came a little way back. "I do not know why it did not come to my mind sooner that the Huntsman had a hand in this matter. Yet he would scarcely be able to do it alone."

"There was little need to. After such a stirring-up as took place yesterday, men might be expected to be ready for any fun. There were no less than twenty of them with him, and their spirits scraped the sky. Had it not happened that their humor was so good, it is likely they would have killed me when they found out that I had followed them here, instead of doing no more than tie me so that I should not give the alarm too soon. They left at daybreak. I managed it to pull one arm free

and slide down on the ground and get some sleep, but the thongs are like red-hot irons upon my ankles. Fetch your knife up here as quickly as you can, and free me."

Alrek was taking another step toward him, when the expostulations of his comrades brought him again to a standstill. "If you are not drowned, what is the reason?" he inquired.

The claw-like hands beat the rock fretfully. "One reason is because I never fell into the water. Whether Thorhall told you so or not, I was not with him when he was wrecked on the Cape. Two days before that, he had deserted me in the south country because I was overlong in getting back to the boat after an exploring trip. It had happened twice before that I was rather late, and he pretended to think that this time also it was carelessness. It is the truth that I had hurt my leg and could not get back earlier. It took me three weeks after that to make my way here. By that time he had got home and told every one that I was dead; and he took it so ill that I should belie him that he would have made it the truth if I had not run away. The time you saw me climbing out of the ice-hole

which I had fallen through, was one time when I barely got away from him. After that, however, it was less difficult; for when he saw how you ran from me, he was willing that I should stay alive so long as I remained dead. The reason I have the appearance of a dead man is because I can not, more than others, get fat and color-full on fish and raw eggs and water." He broke off impatiently: "Is it not clear to you yet, you blocks of peat?"

The Champions looked at one another doubtfully. It sounded reasonable, and yet——

"You have always made it a point that your foster-father, Biorn, should help you out of difficulties. What is the reason that you did not go to him with this one?" Brand demanded.

At least, Hallad's temper was alive; it sparkled in his hollow eye-sockets. "As well go to Biorn's dogs because they have teeth! It seems to me that you have been fooled enough to be able to understand that the glance of Thorhall's sly green eyes has more power in it than Biorn's blundering fist."

Though it is a strange thing, it is true that for the time being they had forgotten the ship. Of

one accord they started forward as it came back to them.

"You know how much of the story is true— " "—what he did intend— " "Give us your opinion whither he has gone—— "

"I — will — not — tell — you — one — thing — until — you — come — up — here — and — release — me," Hallad's thin lips bit off his decision.

Alrek set forth his counter-condition. "If you will allow me to prick your skin with my sword so that I see blood come out of your flesh, I will believe that you are not a ghost."

One of the skeleton-like arms was stretched over the rock before he had finished. Drawing his sword, he went forward and scratched a cross upon it; the lines were instantly blurred with blood. Without more ado, he climbed up the bank and around the boulder and cut the bands, and the ghost returned his hand-clasp with most unghostlike pressure,—after which he sank down upon the bank to rub his chafed ankles.

"It was like his spitefulness to tie them so tight," he whimpered. "And besides this, I am starved. If there are any tidings you want to

know, you would better be quick about asking, before I take myself where I can get some curds and bread."

From their answer it appeared that they had several things to ask. "Tell us where he is going with our ship—" "Tell us how much truth there was in the dwarf-story—" "No, about his purpose in sharing his secret——"

While one of Hallad's hands continued rubbing his ankles, the other one scratched his head. "Now if he has gabbled about dwarfs, it does not appear to me that he did share his secret. Certainly I did not see any dwarfs, nor hear of any. One day when Thord and I had staid with the boat and he and Swipdag had gone far inland, he came back with a gold chain; and they both said that they had seen Asbrandsson, the Broadwicker's Champion whom Snorri Godi outlawed from Iceland many years ago. Where a story passes through many mouths it is likely to become somewhat chewed, and it may be that they were lying then also; but they told how Asbrandsson related about a settlement which white men from Ireland had made further south. He dwelt among them, he said; but it seemed that

they lived too quietly and sang too many priest-songs to please him well, and therefore he would like to come to Vinland if so be that Karlsefne the Lawman would admit a fellow of his bad fame. As a present to get him good-will, he sent the Lawman a chain by Thorhall; but that Thorhall put it to other uses is easily guessed. It is less easy to know whither he intends taking the ship. It may be that he has gone south; and it may be, as I said before, that the story of White Man's Land is also a lie."

They loosed mouthfuls of angry denunciations. "But why take so much trouble to make up a story—" "What aid was it expected that we should give?" "Why did he not give the message to the Lawman?"

"Now are you so witless that I do not wonder he found pleasure in fooling you," Hallad snapped as he got painfully upon his feet. "How would he have got booty if he had told Karlsefne, who would have forbidden fighting between the settlements? It is likely that he made up the dwarf-story because he thought it unadvisable to trust you with the truth. And the reason he stood in

need of you was because it was necessary that he should have some one to fight under him, and until yesterday the men would not listen to him. It is not certain, however, that he would not have taken the ship alone anyway, after Alrek got back to the chieftainship. It appears that the Sword-Bearer's power is greater than the Huntsman liked."

Alrek straightened from the boulder against which he was leaning, and put out his hand as Hallad turned and planted a foot higher up the path.

"There is one question more—about the man who killed the first Skraelling. Do you know who that is?"

Pausing with one foot up and one foot down, Hallad looked at them strangely. "Do you not all know?" he asked at last.

They cried in one triumphant breath: "It *was* the Huntsman!"

"The Huntsman?" Hallad repeated, and amazement was too plain in his voice to be mistaken. After a minute, he grasped a down-hanging root and pulled himself up to the next step,

and would have departed without another word if Alrek had not reached up and clasped him around the ankle.

"What do you mean by that?" the Sword-Bearer asked him. "If it was not Thorhall, who was it? I shall not let you go until you tell me." He gripped the raw ankle harder than he knew; Hallad gave a great gasp of mingled pain and anger.

"I have not as yet said too much, but I think I need not spare you since you challenge me! It was you yourself; my own eyes saw you. It happened that I was hiding behind a wood-pile in the hope that I could slip into one of the booths and get a weapon for myself. I saw you fall, and I saw the Skraelling lean over you and make a grab at your sword; whereupon you leaped up and buried the hatchet in his head, and he toppled over into the hollow—Now there is no need of your looking at me in that manner! I would not have spoken if you had not dared me. I will say nothing about it anywhere else. I——"

But it is not likely that Alrek heard; he stood

as though turned to stone, gazing at the speaker out of horror-widened eyes. "You saw . . . me . . . do it?" he breathed.

Looking down upon him, Hallad's face was red and regretful. Although it was plain that no great boldness was in his spirit, it was also clear that his mind was not ill-intentioned. "A great mishap was this that you should ask me," he stammered. "I suppose it was the knock on your head that caused you to forget. But I thought that—Of what use was it to dig it up again! I had the intention to say nothing to any one. It seems most likely to me that the Huntsman put a spell upon you; his eyes are more than equal to it. You need not be so sensitive as to blame. So long as Karlsefne has pardoned you and given you your honors back, your fate does not depend on this——"

Through his speech, the voices of Gard and Brand and Erlend broke shrilly: "You flung back his pardon!" "You bought your honors—" "You pledged your life on your guiltlessness!"

Out of stiff lips, Alrek confirmed it: "I pledged my life."

Hallad turned, wailing, and ran up the bank and into the forest; and the four comrades were left to face it together.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH ALREK SWORD-BEARER FACES DEATH

BRAND lay on the ground, shaking with great sobs; and Gard squatted, half sitting, half kneeling, his huge hand crushing to powder the shells he had picked up without knowing what he did. It spoke much for the lessons the two had learned that neither offered plans of rebellion or suggested escaping through the loophole of a trick. Dully, the Ugly One spoke to Alrek Sword-Bearer, where he stood as though turned to stone.

"Alrek, say that the lie did not make it any worse for you. Let me have that to remember."

Alrek answered without turning his eyes from the sullen water, wrinkled now with rain-drops: "It did not make it any worse for me. . . . I did you wrong in believing you guilty."

"Why was this so? If only we could have got away on the ship, it is not likely that you

would ever have found it out," Brand sobbed passionately.

"I wish that I might have had one voyage on The Fire," Alrek said slowly. "More than anything else I like to stand on a ship when the wind is blowing under her wings, and feel how I am being carried forward into happenings of interest. I thought I had many such voyages before me, and that I should accomplish some things which the saga-men would think worth talking about. And I believed that I should die in a manner to leave honor behind me. Never did I guess in the deepest hiding-place of my mind that I should be put to death for causing the defeat of my chief—" His voice broke in uncontrollable revolt. "I can not believe that I was such a madman! It must be as he says, that the Huntsman laid a spell upon me. I can not believe that I would so lose my sense!"

"It is often said in Greenland that the Huntsman's eyes are capable of turning curses on whomsoever he will," Gard said heavily.

"It was seen by every one that he felt hatred against you," Brand added in his unsteady voice.

"Ever since he saw that you had better sense than others, he has wished you evil."

Lifting his head out of his hands, Erlend spoke bravely: "It does not seem likely to me that Heaven would deal with you so unfairly. It is foolish to hurry ahead of one's luck. I have hope of getting rid of this trouble because of Karlsefne's love for you. Of his own accord he offered you mercy——"

"And I chose justice," the Sword-Bearer reminded him grimly. "Do you not see? I may not even ask for a pardon. It is a jest of the Fates,—a nithing jest!" It may be that his voice would have broken again if a great roar of thunder had not cut him short; the rapping of his fists was sharp upon the boulder at which he was staring down.

But, gradually, the control which seldom slipped far out of his grasp was gathered again into his hands. When once more it was quiet save for the rustle of the rain on the leaves, he spoke steadily: "I recollect how my father used to say that a soldier had a low mind who could not trust the chief he had chosen enough to follow him

through some moves which he could not understand. Now it is certain that I can not see why Heaven has the wish to turn this against me, but I am not going to be so poor-spirited as to make a fuss about it. Let us go back now. Waiting will not help if death is fated to me."

It showed again the discipline they had gone through that although Brand's throat was rent anew with sobs and Gard's face became as white as was possible to its swarthiness, neither had any resistance to offer. Rising heavily, they followed their chief up the bank and along the wood-paths which always before they had traveled plan-laden and light-footed with hope.

Because of the rain, the tables under the trees were deserted; what sound of voices there was came from Karlsefne's booth. In wordless understanding the comrades walked toward it; only as they passed the empty booth of the Champions, Alrek spoke:

"It is likely that the band is loitering somewhere in the woods to talk about the fate of the ship. I am glad it happened so, unless they come back just as I am being fetched out. I give it

into your hands, Erlend, to see that they do not behave foolishly."

Out of his tear-stained face, Erlend's honest blue eyes met his chief's fairly. "I will see that you have your way," he promised.

Alrek, walking in the middle, stretched out his arms and put one around Erlend's neck and one across the shoulders of Brand; and so they came across the rain-beaten green in silence. At the threshold, they paused to grasp one another's hands strongly and long; then the Sword-Bearer pushed wide the half-open door and they went in.

In the dignity of his high-seat Karlsefne sat, holding council with his chiefs. Snorri of Iceland occupied the seat of honor opposite him; and on his left was Gudrid, and on his right the burly and big-hearted Biorn Gudbrandsson, his hand still patting the shoulder of his foster-son who sat on the footstool before him, munching bread as though he would never leave off. That the excitement of Hallad's return had subsided, however, was evident since it was of something altogether different that the Lawman was speaking as the Champions entered.

"You need not get afraid that I undervalue your power of fighting," he was saying to the triple rank of sullen faces that lined the walls. "That one Northman is more than equal to one Skraelling—provided he can get within arm's reach of him—I do not deny. It would be a strange thing if Northmen could not fight, after the practise they have had! What I want to get into your heads is that you will never face them one to one, nor one to five, nor yet one to ten; but that they will always come in herds and shoals and swarms, as when the Lord sends a plague of creatures on a country. For I think it is as a plague they have come upon us. Here the All-Father had spread a Heaven-like land, and stored it with food and property for all. Here He brought us in peace to take as free gifts whatsoever we would. It might have been a never-emptied treasure-house for all our race, a peace-land for Northmen of all time. The trouble that has come into it is of our own bringing, brought in our blood as vermin are brought in ships. The hand of the Lord is against us; it is my advice that we bow before His wrath. Natures such as ours have no

right to softer things than Greenland cold and Iceland rock. It is my ruling that when the spring comes we shall go back over the ocean."

Like a mighty bell tolling for a death, his voice echoed through the hall. For a time they seemed awed against their will; and here and there a man made the cross-sign. But presently the heavy voice of Hjalmar Thick-Skull was heard saying to his neighbor:

"A Viking voyage, comrade,—that is what it means! A Viking voyage from Norway before the grass comes up again!"

Quickly those around him caught up the words: "Viking voyages,—that is true!" "Hail to the Lawman!" "Ho for Norway!" "For England and the Danes!" "Ho for warrior-life again!" "Hail!" "Hail!" "Hail!" Their swelling cheers vied with the thunder pealing overhead.

To Alrek Ingolfsson, waiting with blood-marked lips held between his teeth, further delay was unbearable. Suddenly he made a step forward where Karlsefne's gaze would fall upon him from the high-seat. As he had expected, the Lawman spoke with frozen courtesy:

"The Chief of the Champions has a right to his place in the council. I give him greeting and ask him to come forward and take the place that belongs to him."

The Chief of the Champions went forward, but he did not take his place upon the bench. Standing before the footstool of the high-seat he spoke briefly:

"I thank you for your greeting, but I came to claim no right, but to render the pledge I made. It has happened that Hallad saw me kill the Skraelling, in that time which I lost out of my mind." He could not bring himself to meet Karlsefne's eyes when he had finished, but turned away and laid a hand on Gard's shoulder and hid his face on his arm.

Above the hubbub that rose, two voices made themselves heard, Gudrid's crying distressfully: "I do not believe it!" and Hallad's wailing: "Why do you betray yourself?" Then the Lawman spoke in a tone that silenced them both:

"Let Hallad tell what he has seen."

It is but justice to Hallad to say that he would have refused if he had dared; and not daring, he

mingled his recital with pleas for mercy. But the terrible evidence had to come out at last.

When the tale was finished and the teller had sunk down in tears upon Biorn's footstool, Alrek lifted a face that seemed pale because such black misery was in his brown eyes.

"I ask you only to believe that when I said I was innocent, I did not know that I was guilty."

After a while the Lawman bent his head. "I believe that," he granted. But he granted no more; and his closed mouth was like a line graven on stone.

It was as though the wind had brought a breath from a glacier through the warm summer day. No man's heart but felt the chill; and gradually the whispers, even the motions, ceased and the room was as still as a Greenland winter.

Slowly the Lawman rose and stood before his high-seat, an awe-full figure as the light fell coldly on the chiseled beauty of his face and the iron of his hair and his beard.

"I believe that you did not know your guilt," he said, "but I believe also that you acted out your true nature when you did the slaying. What

Hallad says about the Huntsman's spell-power is child's talk. No spell was on your father when he committed such crimes, and none was on you when you attacked the Skraelling on the Cape of the Crosses. I think now what I have thought always,—that you struck this blow in the Berserk madness which is like poison in your blood; even as you struck on the Cape, even as you would strike again though the welfare of a thousand men should hang on your peacefulness. The cause of a hundred you have already defeated because I pardoned you once; I dare not risk sparing you again. You offered me your life. I take it. There is a gallows ready where a pine-tree stands by the Skraelling's mound. It is my command that Lodin and Asgrim and the men beside them, put you into fetters and take you forth and hang you there."

Gudrid fell back in a half-swoon, and through the hall swelled a murmur like the rush of a rising wave. But the Lawman stretched forth his hand, the flash of his eyes like the gleam of ice in the moonlight; and the wave fell, sputtering and hissing, until it had smoothed out into silence.

Alrek Ingolfsson spoke only once, when they

had finished pinioning his arms. "Like a sheep-killing dog!" he said under his breath; and his head sank beneath its weight of shame, and he did not raise it again but went away without looking into any one's face.

With the opening of the door came in the noise of rushing wind; then the door closed upon it, and throughout the length and breadth of the hall there was no sound save for the half-sobbing breaths of Gudrid struggling back from her swoon, and no motion until all at once the Lawman sank into his high-seat and covered his face with his mantle.

It is a strange thing that at the moment Karlsefne's eyes were covered, the veil fell from Gudrid's. Lighting on Hallad, her glance rested there dully for a while; then all at once it sharpened to more than ordinary keenness. Rising from her seat, she leveled one slender arm at the cowering figure.

"I think you did the slaying yourself!" she breathed.

At Hallad's recoil and Biorn's bewildered query, the Lawman looked up questioningly; and Gudrid

put her other hand upon his shoulder and shook him in her passion of eagerness.

"Will you allow your kinsman to die because of your slowness? Promise life to this coward and he will confess guilt. I see it in his face."

But the Lawman had no need to speak, for this sudden focusing of all eyes upon Hallad lay bare his secret like a bolt from the skies, and struck him down at Gudrid's feet.

"It was the Huntsman who made me!" he screamed, and groveled shrieking it over and over. Gradually, his foster-father gathered from the broken words that the Huntsman had made it the one condition of his remaining alive and coming back to camp after his own departure, that he should break up the peace by a man-slaying; and he had used the stone hatchet, which he had stolen from Alrek's unconscious body, because that chanced to be his only weapon when a moment later he came unexpectedly upon the Skraelling.

But only Biorn, his foster-father, stayed to hear more. At the first cry, Karlsefne had crossed the booth in three strides and vanished through the door, and Gudrid had followed him, and the three

Champions. And now the maids and the throng of men turned from Hallad and streamed out into the clearing air and across the green toward the Champions' booth, beyond which a knot of people stood under a pine-tree from whose outreaching bough dangled a grape-vine noose.

The loop was empty, for Alrek Sword-Bearer stood below, freed of his bonds, his head bent over Gudrid's hands; and Karlsefne was speaking with a quiver in his deep voice:

"I will make this up to you a hundredfold. My smiths shall build you another ship and a finer one, and you shall furnish it from my stores and have the rule over it and take it where you choose. My own son shall have no larger share in my property and my honor and my love."

Alrek lifted his brown eyes, glowing golden like the sunshine filtering through the rain-washed air; through lips not yet steady, he answered: "The debt will be more than paid."

Suddenly Karlsefne laid a hand upon his shoulder and spoke so that all around could hear: "I will call no voyage unlucky which has brought me to know a man with so high a mind and so

brave a heart. I look on this as a proof that good intentions will get the victory over evil in the most unexpected way; and I will take it as an omen that the good which I have tried to get out of this land for my countrymen will come to them yet in some way which I can not now see. We will go back neither bitterly nor despairingly, but giving thanks for the good we have received and cherishing hope for the future. Now, it is my offer and will that every one in hearing shall come to-night to the best feast I can make, in honor of the Chief of the Vinland Champions and his men."

It is a good thing that he intended to stop there for not another word could be heard, such jubilating and weapon-clatter went up; and the Champions took their chief upon their shoulders and bore him back in triumph, followed by a cheering train.

THE END

EPILOGUE

THESE are the rest of the sayings about this expedition.

All the ships came safely to Greenland except the vessel of Biorn Gudbrandsson, which was driven out into the ocean that stretches between Greenland and Iceland and there came into a worm-filled sea. By the time Biorn had discovered their danger, the ship was worm-eaten beneath them; and it was seen that the only way was to go down into their long-boat which was coated with seal tar. Since the boat was too small to hold more than half of them, they cast lots for the places; and it fell to Biorn and half of the men to go down in safety, while the other half remained with the sinking vessel. No one thought of making any fuss about this save the boy who had come with Biorn from Iceland. When he saw the others go down into the boat, he began to whimper:

"Do you intend, Biorn, to leave me here?"

Biorn glanced up at him absently. "So it seems," he answered.

The boy began to sob. "You did not promise my father that you would part from me like this, when I left Iceland with you," he said. "You promised that we should always share the same fate."

Biorn made the men a sign that they were not yet to cast the boat loose. Big-hearted kindliness was in his voice as always.

"So be it," he answered. "It shall not remain this way, since you are so eager for life. Do you come down here and I will go up on the ship."

It may be imagined that the young Icelander lost little time obeying. When he had come down, the chief went back upon the vessel; and the two parties separated. In time, the men of the long-boat came to Dublin in Ireland, where they told this story; but it is believed by most people that Biorn and those with him went down in the sea of worms, for they were never heard of again.

It is but little more than this which is known about the fate of the Huntsman and his followers. One time, traders came back to Greenland with the

tale that Thorhall had been shipwrecked in Ireland, and that his men had been made thralls of and grievously misused, and that he had met his death there. No one ever got other tidings than these.

Better luck went with Thorfinn Karlsefne and Gudrid and those in their following, for the summer after they had landed in Greenland they went home to Iceland, and lived there in great splendor and happiness; and many famous men and high-minded women have descended from them.

Best luck of all, the foretelling of Karlsefne has come true; and despite delays and hindrances, his countrymen have found a peace-land and a never-emptied treasure-house not only in Vinland the Good but in the whole of the new-world country which those who are alive to-day call America the Free.

(1)

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